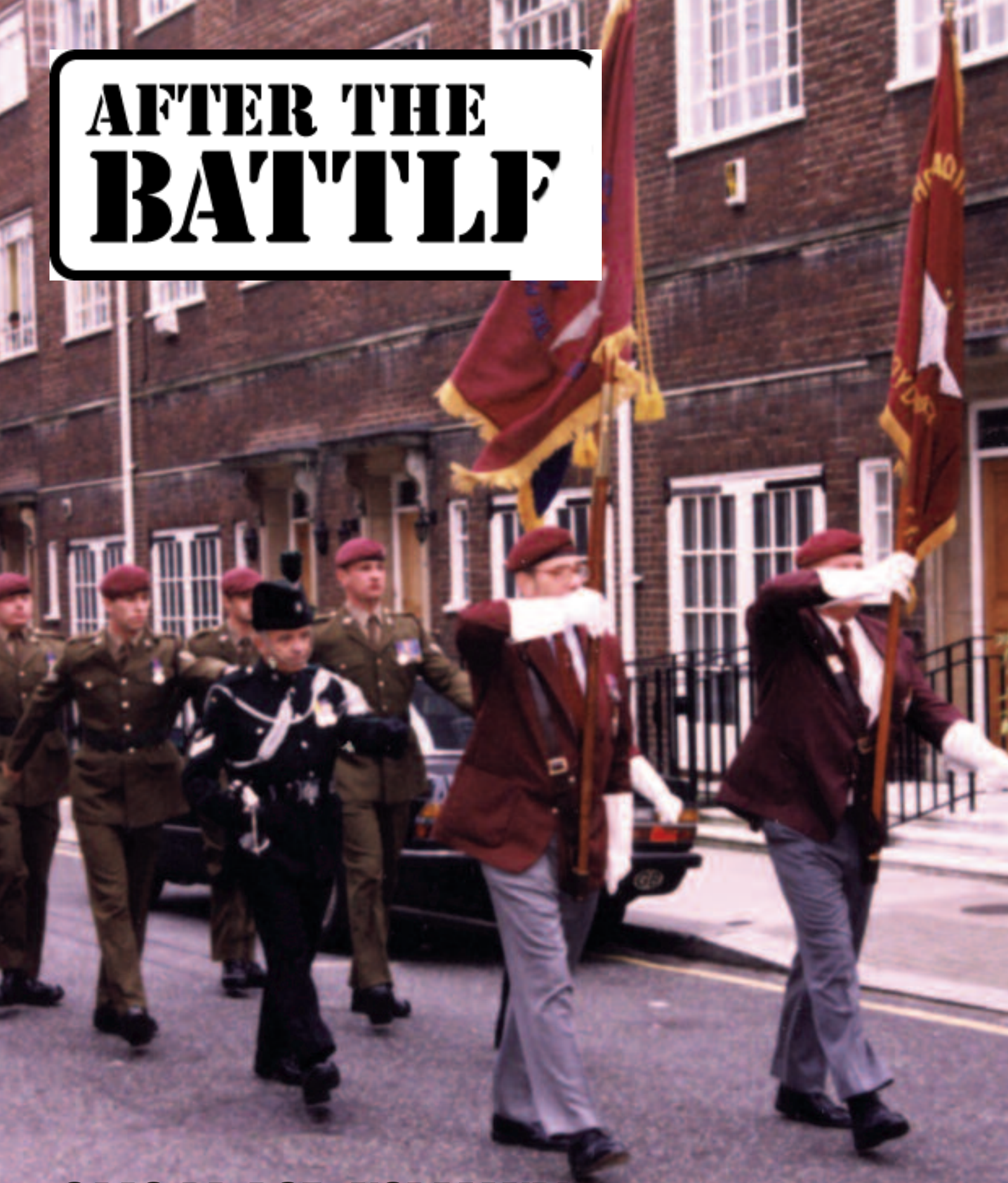


AFTER THE BATTLE



**ISAAC BRIDGE, NORMANDY
GERMAN SKAGERRAK BATTERIES
BATTLE FOR WETTEREN BRIDGE**



£3.10

Number 107

AFTER THE BATTLE

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Front cover: A colour party from the Royal British
Legion leads the parade along Sloane Court, in
front of the site where over 70 American Service-
men lost their lives on July 3, 1944, for the unveil-
ing of a commemorative plaque in Turks Row in
October 1998 — see page 10. (Brian Humphreys)

Centre Pages: Fifty-five years after it fell to Soviet
forces, Berlin becomes the German capital again,
the Reichstag restored for the new German
parliament building. (Peter Thompson)

Back Cover: No longer forgotten. Little Nicholas
Kotlarewski, grandson of Jim Richmond, beside
the headstone erected on the formerly unmarked
grave of the first civilians killed in England in the
Second World War — see page 22. (After the Bat-
tle)

Acknowledgements: The Editor would like to thank
Hay Reintjes for providing the wartime pictures of
Broekhuizen and for showing him around the
Broekhuizen battlefield.

Photo Credits: IWM — Imperial War Museum,
London. PRO — Public Record Office.



The Editor at ATB's Advanced Command Post in the Netherlands.

From the Editor . . .

It is now two years since I took over
Editorship of *After the Battle* from Winston
Ramsey. Nobody will be surprised that I felt
a bit anxious about taking over the helm, so
it was very pleasing to receive so many con-
gratulatory letters upon my promotion. I
hope that the past eight issues have reas-
sured readers that the magazine does indeed
continue in the style and format established
by Winston over the preceding 25 years.

From his 'Grand Finale' in issue 100, quite
a few readers concluded that Winston had

retired altogether, and would no longer be
involved with the magazine. They will be
pleased to learn that in practical terms
nothing has changed. We carry on much as
before, working alongside each other, with
Winston keeping a supervisory eye as
Editor-in-Chief. There is a practical need for
this construction as well, as I am based in
Utrecht in the Netherlands (the 'Advanced
Command Post' as we call it) while Winston
is at the main office in London ('Main Head-
quarters').

S.1320b.		NAVAL MESSAGE.		Revised December, 19.	
For use in Signal Department only		EL SANDI			
Originators Instructions: (Indication of Priority, Intercept Group, etc.)				Immediate	
TO:				FROM: R. H. C. H. A.	
Write Across		Common cause hostilities at once against Germany		1120	
				15	
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				35	
				40	
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Cab. No.	System	P.O.	Time of Receipt	Operator	Time of Despatch
	Tel		1145	1130	39

The message received by Signalman Harry Kane aboard HMS *Eclipse* on the first day
of the war — September 3, 1939.



Sixty years after war's beginning, former evacuee children march to Westminster Abbey on September 3, 1999.

1999 saw the start of a new series of jubilee commemorations, bringing both the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War and the 55th anniversary of major battles like D-Day in Normandy, Operation 'Market Garden' and the Battle of the Bulge. Compared with the massive commemorations of 1994-95, those of this year appeared in general to be more modest events which is not surprising when one considers that even the youngest of the veterans are now approaching their 80s. It remains to be seen how the turn of the Millennium will affect remembrance events in the future.

The 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the war saw the culmination of efforts by James Roffey, founder of the Evacuees Reunion Association, to spotlight the largely forgotten three million British children evacuated from their homes and families away from the danger area in September 1939.

The need for such an association arose during the celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of VE-Day in 1995. When James, an evacuee himself, wrote to the government to ask whether provision had been made in the parade for the inclusion of former evacuees, he received a negative response. Pressing his case, he was finally allowed 50 places, albeit too late to invite anyone other than his brother to attend.

From that humble beginning, the association now has members in all parts of Great Britain, also Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States and elsewhere. It has helped many people to contact their wartime friends and to exchange memories with others who, from personal experience, have an understanding of the long-term effects of the evacuation.

On Friday, September 3, 1999, hundreds of 'grown up' children, now in their 60s and 70s, assembled on Horse Guards parade ground, all ticketed and labelled, for a march to Westminster Abbey. Following the service, wreath-laying and a Spitfire flypast, lunch was served in the Central Hall where there was an opportunity to meet the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester before a special advance showing of the documentary *The Story of the Evacuation*.

The contact address for joining the association is The Evacuees Reunion Association, Suite 1, Goodbodys Business Centre, 17 Albert Road, Retford, Notts. DN22 6JD.

In connection with the start of the war, we received an interesting snippet from James Kane of Portadown, County Armagh, Northern Ireland: 'My grandfather Signalman Harry Kane, a veteran of the Great War, was recalled to the colours in 1939, served in the Royal Fleet Reserve with the destroyer HMS *Eclipse* and later in the Q Ship HMS *Cape Howe*. He was lost at sea on June 21, 1940 when HMS *Cape Howe* was torpedoed and sunk by U-28. I have a large amount of service documents and photographs of my grandfather, the most important of which is an original signal sheet which contains the Declaration of War message sent to the Royal Navy on September 3, 1939. As a signalman my grandfather took the actual war declaration message for his ship which at that time was HMS *Eclipse*. He obviously realised how important that slip of paper would be in the future. The message read "Commence hostilities at once against Germany".'

D-Day, and the build up to D-Day, never fails to produce interesting follow-up stories. Two readers wrote in about the pre-invasion inspection visits by top commanders.

Edmund Galvin, a veteran of the US 2nd Armored Division, from Buffalo, New York State, corrected us on what we wrote about the visit by Churchill, Eisenhower and Bradley to the Tidworth shooting ranges of March 24, 1944 (issue 100):

'The picture on page 29 was taken at Tidworth Barracks, which housed the 2nd Armored Division, not the 9th Infantry Division. The general officer to the right of Mr Churchill wearing a combat jacket with the 2nd Armored patch is Major General Edward H. Brooks, the divisional commander. The upper left-hand picture shows an American officer wearing cavalry breeches and boots, as many did at that time, being part of an ex-cavalry division.'

'I was with Company B, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment of the division — a corporal in a machine-gun squad. I had been with the outfit since North Africa. We fought on foot, or dismounted, in Sicily, as our half-tracks stayed behind in North Africa with the drivers. We did not see our own vehicles or drivers until we got to Tidworth Barracks in November 1943. The division had landed at Bristol on our Thanksgiving Day.'

'The day of the firing demonstration we were detailed to set up targets and various weapons for the visiting VIPs, and police up the area after they left. We were told to stay in the background while the VIPs were there, but General Brooks led General Eisenhower over and he thanked us for our work. I stayed in the service until 1967 — retiring as a regimental adjutant of an infantry regiment (mechanised). PS: None of the brass hit the targets very well.'



The US 2nd Armored Division team which assisted at the VIP firing demonstration at Tidworth in April 1944. Corporal Edmund Galvin second right in the front row.

Stephen Dent of Bath supplied background details about Montgomery's visit to Sittingbourne in February 1944 which we illustrated in *D-Day Then and Now*:

'My mother was a schoolgirl in Sittingbourne during the war. I spotted that the photographs at the bottom of page 95 were of Sittingbourne, so when she was down on a visit last week I showed them to her to see if there was anything of interest. Her face was something of a picture when she said "Yes, that's our house on the right!" Actually, I should think my face was a picture too!

'Anyway, I hardly needed to quiz her, she had lots to tell me, and could even remember the actual events pictured. She hadn't really known at the time what was going on, and wasn't really terribly interested being a little girl totally bored by the war (though, to her credit, she understands fully why I find it all so fascinating).

'I may as well recount everything, even though much of it is not terribly exciting. First thing is that the sports ground was in fact owned by the town's main employer, Edward Lloyds paper mill, which only later on became Bowaters, and was in fact in Gore Court Road. Woodstock Road, my mother reckons, is at the other end of the town. The road in the background of the photo is Whitehall Road, and my mother, her mother, father, brother and pet dog lived in the house on the right-hand edge of the picture, which was called Chalfont.

'It was hard to see into the sports ground from Whitehall Road, there being a tall wooden slatted fence along the edge. In order to see into the ground my mother had to stand on the front wall of her garden. She remembers all the troops, and lots of excitement, though she missed the actual review because she was at school. When she came home there were just lots and lots of soldiers



Ken Oultram with the plaque in memory of General Patton unveiled at Ruskins Rooms, Knutsford, on VE-Day 1998.

milling around. They were there just for that one afternoon. The thing that made the most impression was that there were endless canvas screens, or maybe tents, for latrines for all the soldiers, and the stench lingered for days, possibly even weeks, afterwards!

Brian Bolderson of Manchester — member No. 56 of the Patton Appreciation Society — informed us that Ruskins Rooms at Knutsford, which 'Blood and Guts' opened as a social club for Allied military personnel in April 1944 (issue 7), has now been adorned with a plaque commemorating that event. The memorial, an initiative of Cheshire historian Ken Oultram (PAS member No. 24), was unveiled on VE-Day in 1998. The building in Drury Lane is today used as office accommodation.

John Huggins of Evesham, Worcestershire, sent us several pictures he took of the pre-invasion training areas at Slapton Sands (issue 44) and elsewhere in the south-west of England. 'Reading *After the Battle* has inspired me to visit numerous sites and make my own investigations over the years. It was not until I went there on holiday that I realised how much activity went on there during the war and how much evidence of it still remains. The Breane Down Fort is not particularly exciting but gives an interesting comparison to similar defences at, say, Dover. I stumbled across the weapons' testing area near Westward Ho by accident. With it having been kept secret for so long, some of the items to be found may not be able to be identified even now.'



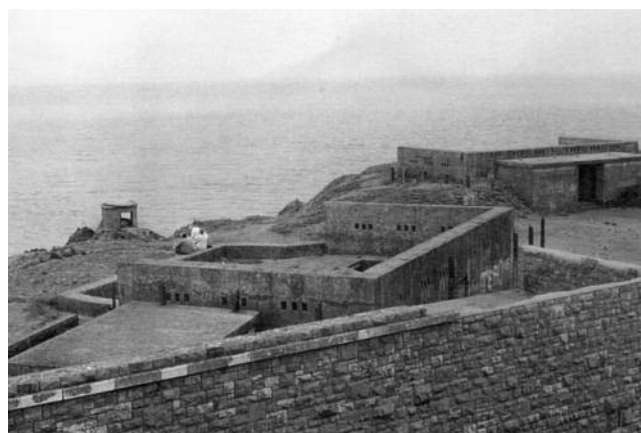
The D-Day invasion training area as explored by John Huggins. Left: Anti-tank defences blasted by US assault troops, surviving



on the beach near Saunton, north Devon. Right: Dummy landing craft, built by US engineers as training simulators.



Bunker at the secret weapons testing area near Westward Ho.



Breane Down Fort, converted to anti-aircraft artillery positions.

Our extensive coverage of Steven Spielberg's movie *Saving Private Ryan* (issue 103) generated a strong complaint from Simon Stoddart of Hastings, who wrote: 'I have been an avid reader of *After the Battle* since the first issue 25 years ago and I look forward eagerly to every new one appearing on the shelf. But what a disappointment issue 103 is. I am completely uninterested in films of actors pretending to be soldiers. I don't buy *After the Battle* for such films and I couldn't believe how much space was dedicated to this *Private Ryan* film — see, I'm so uninterested, I don't even recall the full title of the film.'

Simon's antipathy to war movies is so great, he said, that he had no intention of going to see the film. Although this makes it difficult to discuss the merits of the movie, we felt an explanation of our coverage was in place. To quote from Winston's reply to Simon:

'The lengthy coverage of the *Ryan* film is not really a precedent as we did the same on *A Bridge Too Far* in issue 17 and *Memphis Belle* in issue 69, judging each on the merits of the film concerned. Apart from the above, reasons for devoting the space we did were the following:

'Firstly, it stands as a milestone production in attempting to recreate the horror and reality of D-Day on Omaha, and the views of the veterans that landed there on June 6, 1944, confirm that it does just this.

'Secondly, film censors on both sides of the Atlantic, and throughout Europe, have accepted that this film, uniquely, has an important message for the younger generation who have no knowledge of the sacrifices made. To this end they exceptionally gave it a lower classification (than would have been the case prior to 1980) to enable it to be seen by teenagers.

'Thirdly, since the film was released last September, readers have been asking for a story on the making of the film, particularly those in America to whom Omaha is synonymous with unnecessary slaughter.

'Lastly we felt we must correct many incorrect accounts that have been appearing about the genesis of the storyline which is based on fact. DreamWorks and the screenwriter both deny this, claiming that the deaths of the Niland brothers had no influence on the film which is patent nonsense as we explain at the beginning of the article. Therefore at the outset we felt it was our duty to set this record straight and bring a focus on those families who lost several brothers.

'We also chose to link it in with the battle at St Sauveur-le-Vicomte as being very close to that in the film 'town' built at Hatfield.'

As if to justify our extensive coverage of the movie, the US Department of Defense in August 1999 announced that director Steven Spielberg had been awarded the Distinguished Civilian Public Service Award, the Pentagon's highest civilian award, for the movie which, in the words of the citation, 'sparked national awareness of the World War II generation's sacrifices'. At the presentation ceremony at the Pentagon on August 11, Defense Secretary William S. Cohen said Spielberg's 'masterpiece poignantly captured the stirring sacrifices of America's World War II heroes, and paid living tribute to their indomitable fighting spirit.' The movie also prompted veterans to reveal personal war stories, Cohen said: 'For decades, many of the veterans struggled to find the right words, the right way to share with family and friends what they had suffered through during that war. Over the past year, we have heard so many stories of veterans, who after seeing this film, finally ventured forth to tell a son, a daughter, or a grandchild of their experience.'

In his reply, Spielberg said that of all his blockbuster films two stand above the rest: 'I feel that as a film-maker, lightning has only



Official praise for *Saving Private Ryan*. US Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen (left) presents the citation of the Medal for Distinguished Public Service to director Steven Spielberg (right) during the ceremony in the Pentagon on August 11, 1999. (US Department of Defense)

struck twice in a way that has filled me up with such pride. One of those times was *Schindler's List*, and the other was *Saving Private Ryan*.'

Despite the movie production team's quest for historical accuracy, Professor Emeritus John K. Lattimer of New York, ex-101st Airborne Division, wrote to us to point out one error:

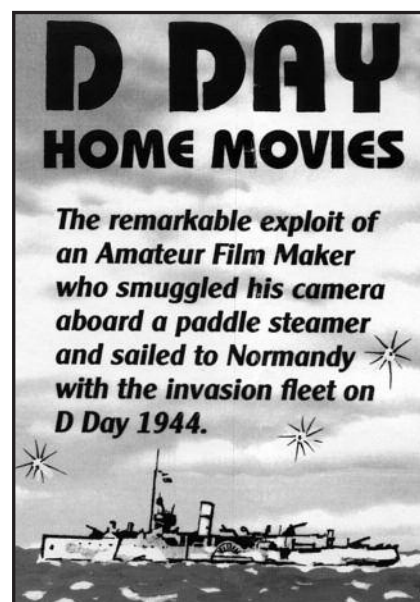
'As a participant in the Normandy invasion, I was startled to see shiny captain's bars on the front of Mr Hanks' helmet in the combat scenes. This was a strictly forbidden procedure in every combat unit I saw, and I saw hundreds. It would have attracted fire to the officers, and would have provided a "bulls eye" for snipers to aim at. We never would have done that. Our officers had one vertical strip of white tape on the backs of their helmets, in the midlines. Sergeants had a transverse band of white tape on the backs of their helmets. That way, your own men could identify you, but the enemy could not. Perhaps there was an explanation for Mr Hanks, but I have been distressed that no one has made an issue of what appeared to me to be a serious blunder. It even discouraged me from going to see the movie.'

David Hale, our researcher in Washington, drew our attention to a section in James Street's book *The Civil War* (1953) which puts a different light on Abraham Lincoln's famous 'Bixby Letter' used so powerfully in the *Ryan* film:

'There came to Lincoln a letter from the governor of Massachusetts that Widow Bixby of Boston had lost five sons for the Union. The story is that Lincoln then wrote his famous letter to the woman and addressed it simply to "Mrs Bixby, Boston, Mass." but it was not sent to the lady. It was sent to Adjutant General Schouler of Massachusetts. He copied the letter. That's his story. Then Schouler raised some money and on Thanksgiving Day of 1864 he took the money, some food and the "original Lincoln letter" to Mrs Bixby. Nobody knows what happened. We don't even know if Schouler stuck around while Mrs Bixby read the letter, or if she offered him a cup of coffee or a bottle of beer. The original letter was lost. There was a widow who apparently didn't value a letter from the President of the United States enough to save it. The Bixby letter that we all have read is the copy that Schouler said he made. OK. The joker is that no Widow Bixby lost five sons for the Union. It is true that the five Bixby boys went into the Union army. One was killed at Fredericksburg. Another was killed at Petersburg. Another was cap-

tured at Gettysburg, was exchanged and went home. A fourth was taken prisoner and then re-enlisted as a Confederate. The fifth deserted from the army and ran away and went to sea. Be all that as it may, the Bixby letter is a masterpiece of Lincolniana, one of the greatest letters of all time.'

Following the success of the movie, Spielberg's production company DreamWorks in December 1998 announced their plans for a 13-part television series based on the film. The storyline will be taken from Stephen Ambrose's bestseller *Band of Brothers* (which, incidentally, proves our point that the original plot for *Saving Private Ryan* came from this book) and will follow a paratroop company (Company E, 506th Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne) from enlistment in the US right up to the end of the war in Europe. The latest news is that Spielberg and Tom Hanks (who starred as Captain Miller in the movie) will each direct three of the episodes. The series will be shot in the UK, much of it again at Hatfield airfield. The village film set erected there for the movie was pulled down afterwards, so the producers will now have to build it anew, on a much bigger scale as it will replicate many of the Continental locations.



Our perception of D-Day in Normandy, like that of the entire war, is usually in black and white. But in a similar way as the colour images of *Saving Private Ryan* partly replace the black-and-white images of the 1962 movie *The Longest Day*, so too there are now colour images to supplement the well-known B/W footage of the actual invasion, as evidenced by *The War in Colour* series recently broadcast in the UK by Carlton TV. *D-Day Home Movies*, released on video in August 1999, includes additional colour footage shot on and around June 6, 1944, by an anonymous cameraman who sailed to Normandy aboard HMS *Aristocrat*. This was the HQ ship of the 'Mulberry B' force which departed from the Solent in Convoy EWC1B, arriving off Gold area at 0870 on the 7th. The footage shows vehicles embarking in Britain, the invasion fleet crossing the Channel, ships bombarding the coast, and British troops coming ashore at Port-en-Bessin. According to producer Tony Blake the original 16mm film was found in two cans among a large collection offered to him from a home clearance in Kent. Earlier footage by the same cameraman shows Navy Brigade camps and HMS *Royal Arthur*, Skegness, in 1940. (The video is available from Archive Film, 49 Chestfield Road, Whitstable, Kent CT5 3LD. Price £15 post free.)

Pegasus Bridge awaiting its fate on the banks of the Caen Canal.

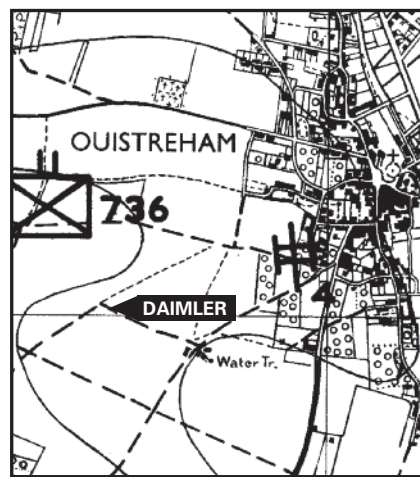
Talking of Normandy, the fate of Pegasus Bridge, stored since 1993 on the banks of the Caen Canal near its original site, is still uncertain, though things appear to be moving. There are now plans for it to be reconstructed as the main attraction in a new memorial park and museum to be created around its old site (where the Pegasus Bridge Museum has now been closed for some time). Not everyone is in favour of the scheme. The owner of the Pegasus Café, Arlette Gondrée-Pritchett, does not think the bridge should be restored as according to her it no longer has any significance. On the other hand, the project has the support of hundreds of veteran associations as well as the local French communes, the British Embassy in Paris and the Colonel-in-Chief of the Parachute Regiment, the Prince of Wales. Councils in Normandy have committed around £400,000 to the project and the Airborne Assault Normandy Trust, which would like it to be a joint venture with Britain, wants to raise another £400,000. Later in 1999, there was talk of the bridge going to the Caen Museum. We await developments.



One of the gun casemates of 'Daimler' battery, just south of Ouistreham, pictured by Russell Jones. Overlooked by most D-Day historians, the battery had four 155mm guns and continued firing until captured late on D-Day by the 2nd East Yorks.

Russell Jones of Liverpool sent us a photo of 'Daimler', the German battery south of Ouistreham captured late on D-Day by the 2nd East Yorks. He was disappointed that we did not include more mention of this strong point in *D-Day Then and Now*. 'The only guide to fully acknowledge this site is

Gateway to Europe by Eddy Florentine, which gives a full account of its capture. It is my guess that this battery, on the way to the capture of which the East Yorks took a lot of casualties, was the only one to keep firing on Sword Beach after mid-day. I know there is no wartime photo of this battery, but this is



Today, only two of the four casemates are left, tucked away in private grounds near the village water tower.

also the situation with 'Hillman' which is well documented in a lot of books, including your own. As the site of Douvres has been opened as a museum after years of dereliction, it appears 'Daimler' is the only D-Day location that doesn't get full recognition, and considering the guns were not silenced until after 6 p.m. I find this most strange.'

In issue 100 (page 17), we wondered what happened to the Canadian Churchill tanks left on the beach at Dieppe. This prompted an interesting letter from Brian Ogle of Selby, Yorkshire: 'I often talk to my father about his wartime experiences and one of those we have talked about over the years is a Churchill tank captured at Dieppe and used against the British. My father was a private in C Company, 1st Battalion, King's Own Scottish Borderers. He landed on June 6 on Queen Red, Sword Beach, with the 9th Brigade (3rd Division). They had to reinforce the Royal Ulster Rifles at a place called Cambes in a wood where the RURs were being mortared taking heavy losses. This is where a lone tank appeared. The anti-tank crew armed with 6-pounders fired and missed with the first round, re-loaded and knocked the tank out with the second round, killing the crew. Later, when the enemy had been dealt with, some of the men walked over to the knocked-out tank and found it was a Churchill with a plaque welded on saying 'Captured at Dieppe'.



The other surviving casemate, now completely overgrown.



Just 18 months after the monument commemorating the IJzendijke explosion (issue 99) was unveiled in the Netherlands, a ceremony took place to add four names to the memorial. The fact that three men of the 11th Medium Regiment, RA, were victims of the explosion became known in December 1997, just in time for us to include them in the list of casualties on page 52, but two months after the monument had been unveiled in October 1997.

The fourth name came about because of our article. Mention in Corporal Lightfoot's letter (page 50) of 'a general fitter [who] later died from his injuries' led Martin Reagan — the driving force behind the memorial — to research further, and this led to the identification of Craftsman William Cameron of the REME, who died of wounds on October 21 and today lies at Adegem Cemetery, as being this man.

This follow-up to IJzendijke gives me the opportunity to correct an unfortunate error in our story in issue 99. Based on the best evidence then available, I included six Canadian soldiers of the Highland Light Infantry of Canada as victims of the explosion, qualifying this in the list of casualties as 'involvement probable, but unconfirmed'. Research had shown that of the 46 men killed, only 40 were known by name. The suggestion that the missing six were perhaps from the HLI had come from Jan Hey of Hengelo, the acknowledged expert on Allied casualties in North-West Europe 1944-45. The suggestion was based on the fact that on the day of the explosion, the HLI were holding the line not far from IJzendijke; they were not in action, yet six of its men were killed that day.

Seeking confirmation in Canada, I contacted Lieutenant-Colonel (retd) Jock Anderson, MC with bar, of Toronto, who in 1944 was padre of the HLI battalion and personally had buried five of the six men in the temporary cemetery at Biervliet. He recog-

In March 1999, British veterans of Operation 'Varsity', the airborne assault across the Rhine (issue 17), returned to northern Germany to present two memorial plaques — one to the Glider Pilot Regiment and another to the 1st Royal Ulster Rifles — to the village of Hamminkeln. Since 1945, frequent reunions have taken place there and the veterans and locals have become firm friends. In 1995, during the 50th anniversary pilgrimage, a memorial had already been laid to the 2nd Ox and Bucks Light Infantry, but a need was felt also to recognise the other airlanding units which played a part in the landings. Present at the ceremony were members of 652 Squadron, 1st Regiment, Army Air Corps, from Gütersloh, Germany, the AAC being the direct descendants of the Glider Pilot Regiment.



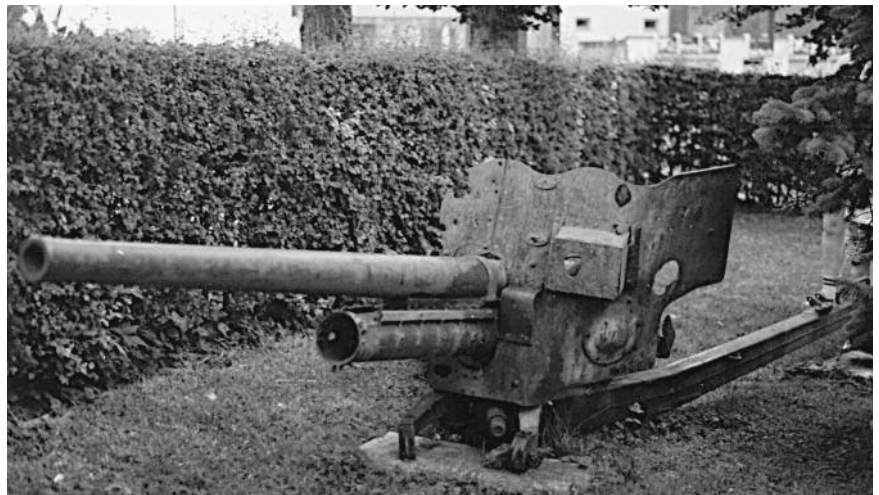
Left: The new plaque on the IJzendijke memorial, adding the names of four victims. Above: Veterans and official guests at the unveiling ceremony, May 6, 1999.

nized one of the six names as that of a soldier who had been 'killed in a barn in an ammo explosion and whose body was totally burnt with only ashes left.' Though he could not recall where this explosion had taken place, it all seemed to fit the IJzendijke accident so well that we decided to include the six names in our account.

It was only after we went to press that we were put in touch with James Short, in 1944 captain commanding the HLI carrier platoon and, as it happened, also the brother of one

of the men killed, Corporal William Short. His evidence, and further inquiries by Jock Anderson and Doug Barry at HLI veterans' meetings, established that the six HLI men were killed by heavy shelling from Breskens and Flushing, and not as a result of the IJzendijke explosion.

As will be clear, correction of the mistake only raises a new problem: with six men detracted and Craftsman Cameron added to the list, this still leaves six victims of the explosion unknown.



When Jean Paul Pallud wrote *The Battle of the Bulge Then and Now*, he lamented that no American artillery pieces survived in the Ardennes. However, Simon Harrold of Melksham, Wiltshire, found this 57mm piece, probably a survivor from the US 1st Infantry Division, near Bütgenbach/Büllingen. The Belgian collector who now owns it claims it was used by both sides during the battle.





Even more unique than we thought: the tank wreck on the Hammelburg firing range, almost certainly a relic of Task Force Baum, is not just an ordinary Sherman but an M4A3 (105mm) HVVSS assault gun. TF Baum had only three of these.

A German reader wrote a nice follow-up to our story of the Hammelburg Raid (issue 91):

'My name is Martin Heinlein. I am instructor for infantry officer cadets at the Infantry School at Hammelburg. The curriculum requires the execution of historical battle-field tours. Next to other themes, we also deal with the 1945 Hammelburg raid. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the excellent article in *After the Battle* No. 91. It was for me a big help in the training of my young soldiers. Much that I had researched myself was also confirmed by the many contemporary photographs.

'In the magazine, the question was raised of the provenance of the old tank wreck [featured on the cover]. I hope I can help you forward a little here. I already discovered the wreck in 1987 during shooting with the 'Milan' anti-tank weapon. At that time, I did not know its historical background.

'When I saw the cover of the magazine for the first time, I thought they had brought together the scrap of two different Sherman tanks, because turret and driving body did not fit together. The wreck had the HVVSS (Horizontal Volute Spring Suspension) driving body of the 1945 Sherman and on top the old turret for the 75mm gun. Until then, such a type was unknown to me.

'When looking more closely, I noticed a feature of the turret that was unusual for this type. The turret had a one-piece commander's hatch with periscope ring. Until then, I only knew of the double-lid type. I leafed

through all the tank lexicons which I could find in our library and found the tank in the book by Chamberlain & Ellis. It is an M4A3 with 105m howitzer. This vehicle was built to support infantry. It had stronger armour, could fire horizontally or trajectory, and because of the new HVSS driving body was sufficiently terrain-worthy. Some 2,500 of this type were built.

'Now to the question whether such a vehicle was with TF Baum or not. According to the official order of battle, which you also give in your magazine, it was not. 'However, if one puts aside the many inaccuracies in Captain Baum's book *Raid*, and closely reads the description of his task force, one will notice that at no time does he mention an M7 'Priest', but always just writes about a Sherman 105mm. Furthermore, he writes that it needed a crew of five, whereas for a Priest one needed seven. In one of the last chapters, he describes how a wounded crew member leaves the vehicle through the hatch. The M7, however, was a vehicle with an open top, the soldier would only have had to drop over the side. This description and tactical considerations allow the conclusion that the official vehicle listing is not correct.'

All this means that, if the wreck on the range is indeed a relic of TF Baum, we can now be more specific and say it is one of the three SP assault guns of Sergeant Graham's platoon from the 10th Armored Infantry. And, if so, that this platoon was not equipped with M7 Priests but Sherman M4A3 (105mm howitzer) HVVSSs.

The future fate of Colditz castle (issue 63) continues to be uncertain. Since the old people's home and geriatric clinic, which occupied the castle in GDR times, moved out in 1996, the castle has stood empty. Already severely neglected by the East German authorities, with hardly any repairs or maintenance being done, the 16th-century Renaissance castle is now increasingly falling apart. Its massive walls are crumbling, window frames are rotting, roofs are leaking, plaster is falling from the ceilings. Despite its decay, some 10,000 tourists — mostly non-Germans, the majority of them from Britain — visit the place every year. But the organised tourists — two bus-loads stop at the gate every month — and the many who arrive individually can now visit only a few of the 740 rooms in the castle. All the others have been declared off-limits by the police for safety reasons. Several floors are closed altogether.

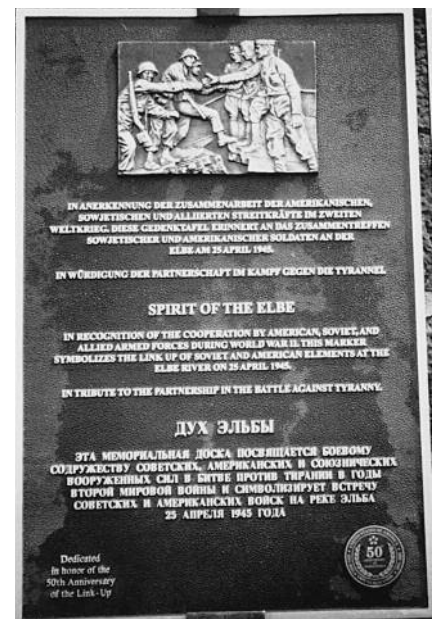
Since 1992, the State of Saxony has spent 4.2 million Marks on repair and maintenance of the building, but this is only a fraction of what is needed to really do the job properly. A restaurant is being set up in the basement, but so far no tenant has been found for it.

Part of the problem is that whereas 'Colditz' is a household word in Britain, its wartime history is not nearly as famous, if not completely unknown, in Germany, which makes it very difficult to convince anyone in Germany that Colditz deserves to be preserved more or earlier than any other historic building. In Saxony alone, there are some 100 castles and country houses threatened by similar decay, all competing for the same funds and means to help them find a new lease of life. For example, a plan to house the Saxon State Music Academy in Colditz castle will probably not materialise now that a competitor, the Hartenfels Castle in Torgau (see issue 88), equally monumental and equally in urgent need of preservation, has proffered itself for the same.

In Colditz town, a local Gesellschaft Schloss Colditz (Colditz Castle Association) has been set up to promote preservation and find a new use for the castle. They hope to turn the castle chapel into a venue for concerts, use the main hall for seminars and the park for summer festivals. Banking on its wartime past, the association strives to improve the castle's museum and to preserve visible traces of the escape attempts. Among other things, the association has recently reopened and restored the original 24-metre-long tunnel dug by the POWs, the entrance to which had been sealed with concrete after



Stephen Miller of Silver Spring, MD, toured Germany in June 1999. He sent us these photos of the small memorial park on the west bank of the river Elbe at Strehla, from where the Kotzebue patrol went across to the first link-up with Soviet forces on April 25, 1945 (issue 88). The memorial park was dedicated in April 1995 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the link-up.





Left and above: Escape tunnel discovered in the sick ward of Colditz Castle in February 1998, pictured by Charles Sait. Note the rusty tins on the tunnel floor.

discovery. The association has also set up its own Internet site (www.cimttz.tu-chemnitz.de/colditz).

Colditz's last hopes are really vested in Britain. In February 1998, the Mayor of Colditz, Manfred Heinz, again visited the UK in another effort to interest British financiers in the tourist potential of the castle. His message was that if Britons would invest 100 million Marks in the castle he was prepared to sell it to them for the symbolical price of one Mark. However, despite support from the British Legion and the Colditz Veterans Association, so far no investors have come forward.

Two readers wrote to tell us of their visit to Colditz. Charles Sait from Chatham, Kent, who went there on February 18, 1998, happened to witness the discovery of something really special:

'Last Wednesday my wife and I visited Colditz Castle. In my many trips to Poland when I was working I usually managed to slip in and each time learned a little more. This time we arranged to have the official tour. Since last there, the patients have gone and the builders are in and the place seems to be being "torn apart". They are converting part of the prisoners' courtyard to a restaurant and bar. We were unable to get down to the

cellar to see the workings there of the French Tunnel.

'However the guide showed us a tunnel in the medical ward which had just been unearthed last week, as they had been breaking up the concrete floor. As you can imagine we were quite excited by this discovery when a young archaeologist came up and almost literally pulled us into one of the side rooms of the ward. He had just that minute taken up one of the thick floorboards and underneath was another tunnel! He said if we came back in 15 minutes he would get a few more boards up and would at least see the direction it was going in. Needless to say we went back and sure enough you could clearly see its direction. In the bottom was a scattering of tins and although they were rusty and rotting it was clear from the label on one that it was from "London".'

Kevin Patience, formerly based at Bahrein, but now living in Poole, Dorset, who regularly sends us his updates on sites covered in the magazine, returned to Colditz in 1999:

'On my last visit in 1994-5 there was talk of turning the castle into a hotel. These plans have been shelved. However a fair amount of demolition and rebuilding was in progress in the inner courtyard where the old "prisoners'

kitchen" building was being knocked down. The old kitchens used to feed the "mental patients" have been gutted. All the stores and sinks, etc, have gone and the white tiling is being chipped off.

'The sick ward/parcels office are being gutted to make a restaurant with a door cut through the wall on to the terrace where the guards used to patrol. The solitary cells have been turned into the toilets for the restaurant. A considerable amount of graffiti has been covered over that adorned the walls.

'The guardhouse overlooking the terrace is now the museum on two floors, and one can look down on the terrace from one of the windows. The displays of escape items, uniforms, etc, are well laid out. Recent finds include alarm clocks and a new display is the Radio Shack "Arthur" that was in the roof.

'The chapel has been opened with a glass panel over the vertical tunnel to the basement, enabling visitors to see down the shaft. Some sections of the roof have been re-tiled together with the clocktower spire. On my last visit the local contractors were hard at work shovelling sand/rock/earth out of the roof into skips — a legacy of the tunnelling. The contractor was surprised to find so much material in the ceilings not realising what the significance of it was.'



The Colditz escape museum is now housed in the castle's guardhouse. Left: A new addition is a reconstruction of the illegal

radio which the prisoners had hidden up in the roof. Right: Close up of 'Radio Shack Arthur'. Photos by Kevin Patience.

We were very interested to receive a letter from Alex Hacker of Toronto, Canada, describing some of his recollections as a prisoner at Dora-Nordhausen (issue 101):

'I was fascinated by your well-researched article and want to thank you for doing it so I can attach it to my own memoirs for my children and grandchildren.

'I was in Dora from December 1944 till March 1945. I was eighteen years old. I was shipped there from Camp Flossenburg having been handed over to the Germans by the Hungarian Army as a Hungarian Jew. I was extremely fortunate having fallen ill during a work detail and ending up in the Dora-Revier (hospital) which was overcrowded but relatively decent. When I came out my former Jewish companions were gone, transferred to one of the nearby satellite camps far worse than Dora at that time. They mostly perished. Dora itself had very few Jews — possibly by design.

'At an SS work-assignment office I made use of my fledgling mechanical engineering education — they tested me with a logarithmic slide-ruler — and was assigned to a life-saving "soft" job in the tunnels to the office in charge of maintaining all the cranes in the works. As an "intellectual prisoner" I was transferred to the elite Block 119. I wrote a diary at the time which I still have and so I am reasonably certain that it was indeed Block 119. On page 12 of your article you describe Block 119 as a storage depot which it indeed may have been earlier.

'When I arrived to Block 119 it housed about 60 to 80 prisoners all in "soft" jobs.



One of the V2 rockets taken from Nordhausen by the Americans in 1945 is today on display at the Cosmosphere space museum in Hutchinson, Kansas. The museum also has a V1. Picture courtesy of Francis Blake of Fullerton, California.

They were mostly French, Norwegians and the odd Pole including the Assistant Kapo in charge. The place was clean and well organized and there was none of the brutality one saw all over the rest of the camp. I was the only Jew, a fact that did not please the Kapo

but he put up with it. Our most important privilege was not having to stand for hours on the Appellplatz while the never-ending counting went on daily in all kinds of weather. We were locked in during counting and an SS man came to count us.'



Two memorials now remember the V1 incident at Sloane Court East of July 3, 1944. Left: The plaque in the pavement in



Turks Row, placed there by Louis Baer. Right: The wall plaque across the road initiated by Bill Figg. (B. Humphreys)



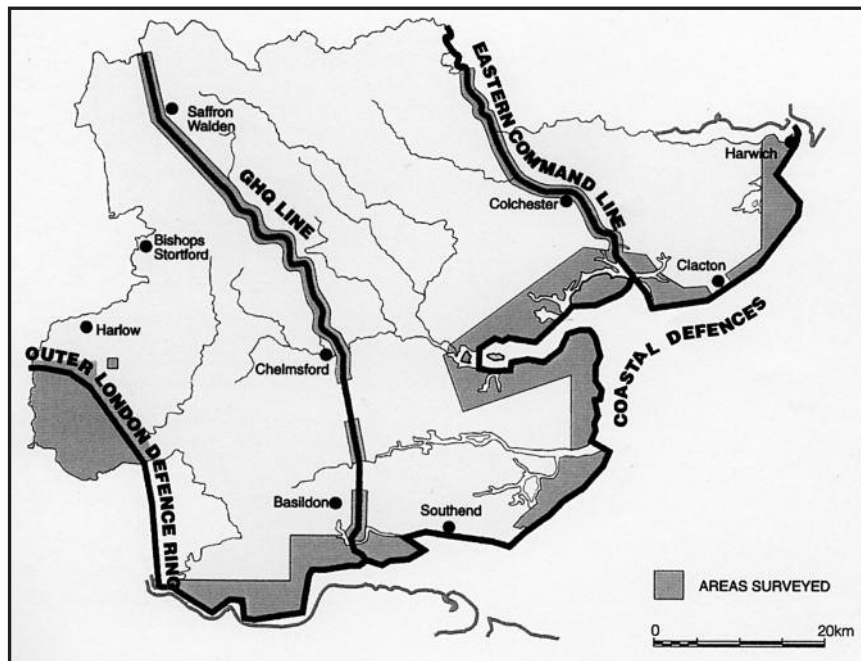
Dedication of the plaque at the rear entrance of the Duke of York's headquarters which stands directly opposite the destroyed block of flats. Nearest to the camera: Bill Figg.

Turning from those forced to make V-weapons to those at the receiving end, the 74 American servicemen and three civilians killed by the V1 flying bomb which came down in Sloane Court East and Turks Row in central London, on July 3, 1944 (see *The Blitz Then and Now*, Volume 3, page 408-409, and *Glenn Miller in Britain*, page 68) are now remembered by two memorials. Early in 1998 and without any prior announcement, American Louis Baer, a former corporal in one of the units billeted at Sloane Court, had a commemorative plaque placed in the pavement in Turks Row. This plaque came as a great surprise to Bill Figg, an ex-RAF air gunner who had himself been knocked to the ground by the bomb blast and had witnessed the devastation first-hand, and who for 30 years had campaigned doggedly for a memorial to be set up. His efforts led to a second plaque being placed beside the rear entrance of the Duke of York's Headquarters in Turks Row. This was dedicated on October 4, 1998, by Councillor Dr Jonathan Munday, Mayor of Kensington and Chelsea. Prior to dedication, the US Embassy approached *After the Battle* for information regarding the explosion.

The research into what remains of Britain's fixed home defences continues. The massive Defence of Britain survey project undertaken by English Heritage is still under way. Fred Nash, whom readers will remember carries on the pioneering work begun by the late Henry Wills, sent us a copy of his June 1998 interim report of the survey carried out by him for the Archaeological Section of Essex County Council. Since 1993, and concentrating on the coastal defences and the three inland defence lines that ran through Essex, Fred has surveyed, recorded and photographed some 1,180 wartime sites (out of an estimated total of nearly 3,000). These include 28 different types of defence works, ranging from one-man 'Tett Turret' firing chambers to coastal artillery casemates, and from mining chambers to 'Mulberry' construction sites. The vast majority of the defences consist of pillboxes (of which there are 760), anti-tank barriers (231) and Spigot mortar emplacements (100).

Our mentioning of scaffolding beach obstacles in issue 100 (page 26) prompted Mr W. Wright of Wareham, Dorset, to remember: 'I finished my last seven years of army service at Lulworth Camp, RAC, and was employed on Range Control. One winter between 1974-77 we had a very bad storm and on checking our coastline within the range area, the high tide had washed away above normal high-tide mark and uncovered beach scaffolding. The amount was too large to move, so it was then covered up and to my knowledge it is still there. The area is called Worbarrow Bay within Tyneham Valley.'

The construction of home defences was not limited to England, as James Kane of Portadown, County Armagh, Northern Ireland, reminded us: 'I have a keen interest in WW2 pillboxes and there are quite a number still in



The result of five years of hard work: home defence areas in Essex surveyed by Fred Nash up to June 1998. The coastal defences and the three inland defence lines that ran through the county have now been thoroughly documented.

situ around my home town of Portadown. The River Bann was a major defence line should the Germans invade and the bridges across the Bann were well defended in Portadown, Scarva and Tandragee.' James wonders why publications on British home defences pay so

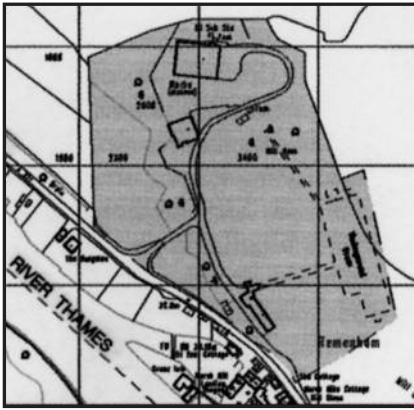
little attention to Northern Ireland, remarking that even the late Henry Wills's standard work *Pillboxes. A Study of UK Defences 1940* (1985) contains no references to the many pillboxes that were constructed and still remain in that part of the United Kingdom.

Defence works in Ulster, photographed by James Kane. Below: Beach pillbox at Downhill Strand, County Londonderry, camouflaged to blend in with the surroundings. Bottom: Pillbox at Cranny Road near Portadown, sited to give in-depth defence to the River Bann defence line.



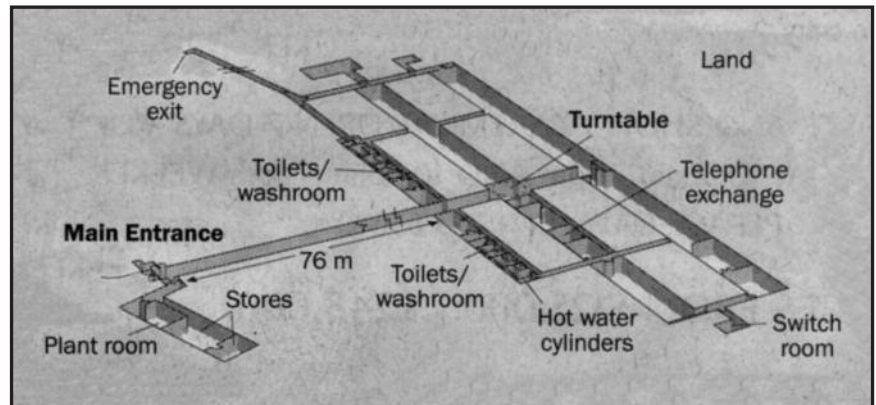
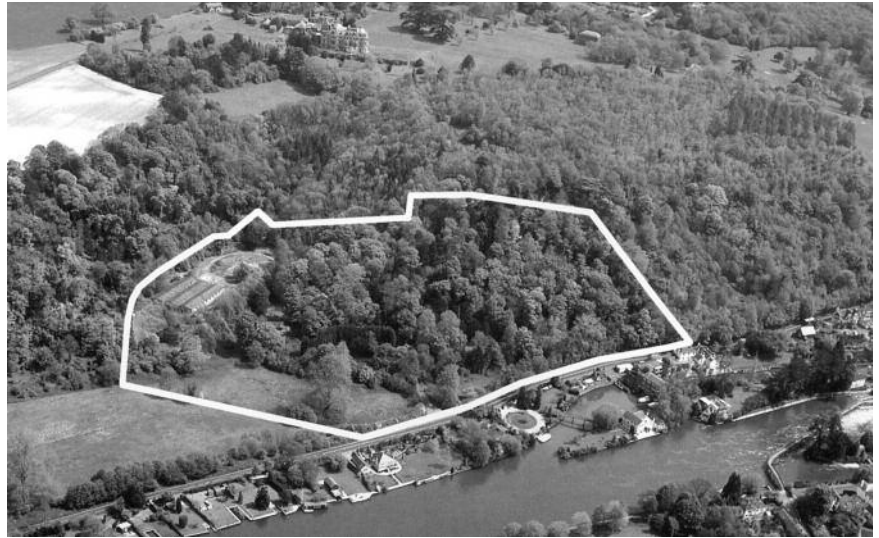
Destroyed: AA tower at Crawley.

At the same time that defence works are being recorded, others are being lost. Ron Russell of Mitcham, Surrey, wrote in June 1998 to report that his firm, 777 Demolition & Haulage Co Ltd, had been contracted to demolish a wartime anti-aircraft tower at Crawley in West Sussex. The tower survived on a piece of land near Forge Farm between Tinsley Green and Rickmans Green, just south-west of London's Gatwick airport. To make sure it was recorded for posterity, Ron took pictures of the tower which he sent us. Starting on July 10, and using the firm's long-reach machine fitted with specialist demolition equipment, it took three days to demolish the tower, including the five-foot-thick base.



For sale: underground aircraft factory outside Henley-on-Thames. Beneath this wooded area of 16,521 square feet — a Ministry of Defence site until 1996 — lies a tunnel complex of 16,000 square feet.

Meanwhile, numerous sites connected with the war continue to be sold off and redeveloped. In November 1998, the Ministry of Defence put up for sale a 16,000-square-foot subterranean complex at Marsh Lock near Henley-on-Thames in Berkshire, which during the war was used as an underground factory for aircraft propellers. The wood-covered site is located just north of the A321 on the edge of the Thames. Berkshire County Council has given planning consent for the construction of a two-storey eight-bedroom house on the site. As a condition, all the old buildings — a factory, canteen, and boiler house — will have to be demolished. The underground complex is reached through a 250-feet-long tunnel cut into the side of a hill. This leads to a rectangular area of further tunnels (each about 25 feet wide and up to about 100 feet deep), storage rooms and offices, with a central circle originally built to allow lorries to turn around. From 1983 to 1996, the site was the secret Emergency Headquarters for HQ South East District, its cover story being that it was used for training the Territorial Army. Unoccupied ever since, it has been heavily vandalised. A further disadvantage is that its industrial use has left the site contaminated with oil and chemicals. The selling agents, Savills, are believed to have received offers between £500,000 and £1 million. One prospective buyer wanted to use the underground complex to house a private art collection, another to store classic cars, and another to grow mushrooms.



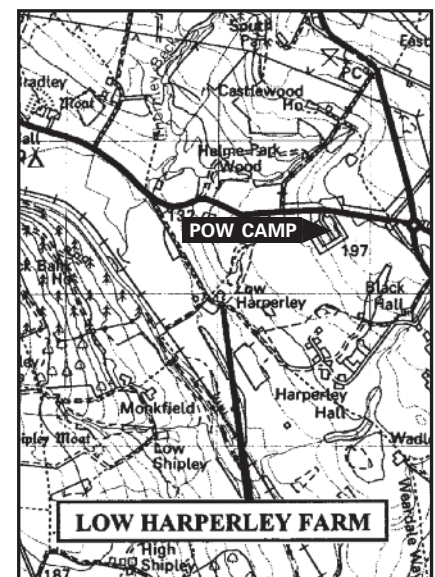
Although exact details are unknown, apparently the tunnels were constructed during the war and used for the manufacture of aircraft parts. In 1952, the site was purchased by the Howden group who produced various types of propellers there until 1985.

Another site put up for sale that drew our attention was Low Harperley Farm, on the A689 between Bishop Auckland and Wolsingham in County Durham. Readers referring to our list of POW camps in Britain (issue 76) will see that this is the location of Camp No. 93, also known as Harperley Camp. Some 40 barrack huts, built by the Italians at the start of the war but chiefly occupied by Germans thereafter, still remain on the side of the valley. The only locked hut still holds murals painted by the POWs:

mountain scenes, flowery curtains on windows, etc. Since 1948, when the last prisoners were repatriated, the huts have been used for agricultural storage. Now they stand overgrown and derelict. The camp lot comprises 17 acres of a total of 470 acres owned by farmer Charles Johnson from 1947 until his death in late 1998. The Wear Valley Planning Authority said that they would prefer to see the plot used for hotel/leisure/tourism purposes. The agents, George F. White, were looking at offers in excess of £100,000.



Scheduled for demolition: huts and buildings of former POW Camp No. 93, Harperley Camp, near Bishop Auckland, Durham.





Another historical location now expunged from the map: South Site of the former Royal Gunpowder Factory at Waltham Abbey, pictured by Steve Heron in April 1998.

A site now finally being redeveloped is that of the Royal Ordnance at Waltham Abbey, formerly the Royal Gunpowder Factory (issue 93). Work began in February 1998 and involved demolishing and decontaminating more than 300 buildings, moving one million cubic metres of soil to level the area, and digging an enormous 50,000-cubic-metre containment pit to hold the contaminated and explosive waste. This pit is to be capped with clay and landscaped, with shafts built to allow monitoring of the waste. Of the 250 acres of land, 28 will be used to build more than 300 homes plus recreation facilities, 48 acres will be turned into a business park and 168 taken over by the Lee Valley Park for a country park, while an area of marsh and woodland will be left untouched — with a total investment of £70 million the biggest project of its kind in south-east England.

The Gunpowder Factory developed on two separate sites on either side of Waltham Abbey. Adjacent to South Site lay the Royal Small Arms Factory (see issue 2). Steve Heron of Leyton in east London, sent us a set of pictures he took in April 1998 just prior to demolition. Steve saw the factory in the *One Foot in the Past* programme on television and decided to go up and look around. He managed to gain access to the South Site climbing over the fence one weekend.

The dangers of bomb disposal work (issue 69) were illustrated once again on August 11, 1998, when one of the Army's leading bomb-disposal experts, Lieutenant-Colonel Mike Watkins of the Royal Logistic Corps, died on an exercise to locate, map and defuse First World War mines left in the 'sap' tunnels at Vimy Ridge in northern France. Watkins was killed when a 30-foot shaft collapsed, burying him in tons of clay and soil. Onlookers tried in vain to reach Watkins after he was first trapped by a rock on his leg, then smothered by the falling earth. It took two hours for the French emergency services to reach him and he was pronounced dead on the scene. Watkins was a veteran of many tours in Northern Ireland and had received the MBE for his work.

While on the subject of bomb disposal, Captain (ret'd) Harry Beckingham, who authored our story on mine clearing in Guernsey (issue 75) has now described his wartime experiences in a book titled *Living with Danger. The Memoirs of a WW2 Bomb Disposal Officer*. Harry worked in London and Hull for four years, being posted in September 1944 to command No. 24 Bomb Disposal Platoon, RE, which took part in the liberation of the Channel Islands in May 1945. The book can be ordered direct from the author: H. W. Beckingham, 64 Hartley Crescent, Birkdale, Southport, Merseyside PR8 4SQ. (Price £7.00 post free in UK; overseas, add £1.00 for EU, £2.50 elsewhere.)

Death still lurks at Vimy Ridge. Bomb-disposal expert Lieutenant-Colonel Mike Watkins exploring an opening to a sap tunnel, seconds before he would be fatally buried under a mass of soil when the wall of the shaft he was in collapsed on top of him. (Justin Leighton)



Adams Hall Camp, of Bamber Bridge mutiny fame, as it was in the early 1960s.

Mark Wilson of Chorley, Lancashire, who is a lecturer at Preston College, has been carrying out research into the Bamber Bridge mutiny (issue 22). He wrote to us in November 1998:

'My research has led me to the article in your magazine written by Kenneth P. Werrell. This is, according to other academics and historians, the definitive account of the event. As you are no doubt familiar with the details I will avoid going over them. However, I must add some information that I have received from a gentleman who was there on the night in question, and provided me with a different account of the events than the one put forward by Dr Werrell, the main difference being the number of casualties. According to the gentleman, there were seven or eight black soldiers killed by white military policemen on June 24, 1943, not just the one, as has been generally accepted. He

gave me a very clear, accurate account of the events that transpired on that night as he was in a butcher shop on Station Road overlooking the riot. He claims to have seen at least four bodies on the pavement outside the shop. These were thrown into the back of a van, and driven away. I realise that the gentleman who told me this is somewhat advanced in years (he is 87) but he is in no way impaired. He spoke confidently of the events and remembered them with astounding clarity.'

When we did the Bamber Bridge story back in 1978, all that was left of Adams Hall Camp, Preston, was one building, then in use by the Air Training Corps. Russel Brown of St Annes-on-Sea, Lancashire, sent us a picture he found of the abandoned and derelict huts of Station 569 as they awaited housing development. Russel thinks it was taken around 1963-64.





Terry Cartwright's *Birds Eye on Wartime Leicester*. The booklet's cover shows the Highfields district, which bore the brunt of the bombing on November 19, 1940.

Terence Cartwright of Wigston, Leicester, sent us a brochure he has made titled *Birds Eye. A synoptic view of wartime Leicester*. 'It has taken a lot of courage to send this booklet to you', Terence writes. 'It can only be likened to sending a home video to Steven Spielberg.' However, there is no need for such modesty as Terence has done an excellent job. Using a series of wartime aerial photographs and a superb annotated map, he documents a large number of places associated with the war years: the sites of air raids and bomb incidents; the position of searchlights, AA batteries and ammunition dumps; and also the location of US Army camps in and around the city (notably those of the 82nd Airborne Division, stationed there before and after D-Day). This excellent 10-page booklet can be ordered direct from the author: TCC Publications, 6 The Woodlands, Wigston, Leicestershire LE18 3QE. Price £3.50.

In issue 100 (page 12) we included Kenneth Webb's memories of the Ju 88 downed near Petersfield in Hampshire on August 15, 1940 (see *The Battle of Britain Then and Now*, page 572). Following this, we received a letter from Michael Curme of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire:

'I must be about the same age as Kenneth as I, too, cycled over to see these crashes — from Alton. My recollections match those you have published but it seems that I was there before him as the swastika insignia were all present but I do recall, most vividly, gypsy women who lived nearby taking the boots from the "dirty feet" of the dead aircrew member and also savagely cutting off his fingers to get the rings he was wearing. These images have stayed with me all these years. The Australian guards mentioned were from an Australian railway battalion under canvas in a field near "The Butts" in Alton. The locals had really never seen such big-hearted, open men before and I can remember a Sports Day they held with such "foreign" sports as log-cutting and rail-laying. These Aussies adopted ten-year-old me as their mascot. I went marching with them and I can still recall the drill of leaping into the hedge when a whistle indicated an aircraft nearing. Somewhere amongst my papers I have a small autograph book with many Australian signatures and comments.'

Nick Wotherspoon of Blackburn, Lancashire, wrote to us in September 1998 to report a piece of shameful vandalism concerning the SOE Hudson memorial in Luxembourg (issue 26):

'During my recent Summer holiday, which as usual consisted of a three-week European tour in our VW camper and included visits to several sites of both First and Second World War significance, I decided to make a return visit to the monument in the Ardennes Forest at Maulusmühle near Clervaux, Luxembourg. It had been some 8-10 years since my last visit, but as I have been actively involved in the hobby of aviation archaeology for the past 17 years, I felt that as we were in the area it would be of interest to my four-year-old son, who is already showing signs of a developing interest in military history. His favourite sites to date are the Hartmannswillerkopf in Alsace and the Pointe du Hoc in Normandy.

'As we approached the memorial up the steep forest track I noticed something seemed amiss. As many readers will know, this memorial includes the graves of the crew of an RAF Hudson aircraft and their Belgian agent passengers and is surrounded by the remains of the aircraft, in the form of the wings, tail unit and engines. Firstly I noticed that the tail unit had been tipped down the slope and rested up against the port engine, presumably done to gain access to the remains of the tail wheel oleo which was now missing.

'There was far worse damage however, which appeared to be very recent, the upper propeller blade on each of the engines had been hacked off close to the propeller hubs. The damage appeared to have been done with a power tool of some description, probably a petrol-driven, paving-stone cutter, leaving a crude and very sharp edge and no doubt leaving the detached blades in a similar condition.

'I am sure that all of your readers would agree that this kind of deplorable vandalism can only have been carried out by a very sick individual who obviously cares nothing for the sacrifice or memory of those commemorated by this memorial and is prepared to desecrate actual graves to further his collection or in some other way profit from this action. It is such mindless and stupid actions that endanger the hobbies of aviation and battlefield archaeology that many of us are responsibly involved in and can only harm our image in the eyes of others.'



This is therefore certainly the right place to mention a new organisation, the Friends of War Memorials (FoWM). Founded by Scotsman Ian Davidson in 1996, it aims to conserve, restore and protect British war memorials of all types, at home or overseas, at risk or cherished. Patron of the FoWM, which is a registered charity, is the Countess Mountbatten of Burma, with Winston S. Churchill as its President. The FoWM's objectives are to monitor the condition of war memorials; to alert and liaise with local and ecclesiastical authorities, regimental organisations, and other relevant bodies with a view to their accepting responsibility for, and undertaking repairs and renovations of neglected, vandalised, or decaying memorials; and to increase public awareness of the spiritual and historical significance of war memorials as part of the national heritage. Since its founding four years ago, the Friends have already saved a large number of threatened memorials, in the process rescuing many vandalised and half-demolished plaques, Rolls of Honour and memorial tablets from council dumps, builders skips and auction rooms. The organisation has built up a network of regional volunteers who assist by letting the FoWM know of war memorials at risk in their area, attend rededications on their behalf, or pay visits to memorials about which the Friends have been notified by the public. Community action teams tackle the cleaning, repair and maintenance of memorials. In co-operation with the Imperial War Museum, the FoWM is undertaking a nationwide survey of the war memorials in Britain, the number of which is estimated at 54,000. (For information or membership applications contact: Friends of War Memorials, 4 Lower Belgrave Street, London, SW1W 0LA. Telephone: 0207 259 0403. Fax: 0207 259 0296. E-mail: enquiries@war-memorials.com Website: www.war-memorials.com).



Vandals have ravaged the SOE Hudson memorial at Maulusmühle in Luxembourg: the upper propeller blades on the engines are missing and the rear fuselage, previously behind the grave stones, has been pulled down the slope and bluntly placed to rest on the engine in the background. Picture taken by Nick Wotherspoon.



The story of *The Man Who Never Was* (issue 54) continues to bring in news, even after Roger Morgan laid the search for the identity of 'Major Martin' to rest with his discovery that he was Glyndwr Michael. Alun Robertson of Barry, Glamorgan, wrote to inform us that Michael has now been honoured in his home village of Aberbargoed in South Wales by a plaque on the village cenotaph gates. The plaque — an initiative of the local Royal British Legion members, the Old Comrades club and the Caerphilly County Borough Council — was unveiled on November 9, 1997, and formally dedicated later that month.

Colin Gibbon from Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan — for many years Roger Morgan's rival in the search for 'Major Martin' —

came up trumps when he discovered where the picture of Ewan Montagu and Jack Horsfall posing in front of the lorry with which they brought the body to Scotland (issue 54, page 16) was taken: just outside and south of the little village of Langbank on the old road between Glasgow and Greenock which runs along the west side of the River Clyde. 'If you look closely at the sign at the side of the road', Colin writes, 'you will see that it reads "Langbank"'. There is no mistaking the location.' As the spot is south of the village, Colin concludes the picture must have been taken on the return journey. He also enclosed a picture he took in 1998 in the mortuary at the Cemeterio de la Solidaridad in Huelva in Spain where the post-mortem on 'Major Martin' was performed.

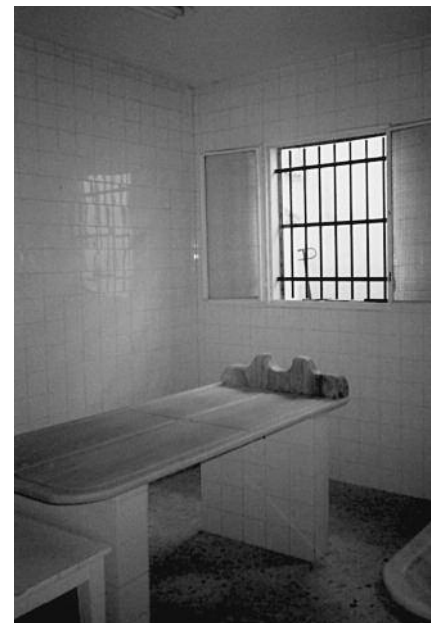


Collin Gibbon found the spot where Ewan Montagu and Jack Horsfall stopped their lorry after delivering 'Major Martin' to HMS *Seraph* in Holy Loch, Scotland: on the old road just south of Langbank on the Clyde. Compare with issue 54, page 16.

'Y Dyn Na Fu Eriodd — "The Man Who Never Was". In recognition of services in the Allied war effort by Glyndwr Michael of Aberbargoed. 4 February 1909 – 24 April 1943. Fifty-four years after his death and subsequent role in Operation 'Mincemeat', Michael's name is added to the cenotaph in his home town.

January 1999 saw the release by the Public Record Office of another batch of personal files from the MI5 archives, the first of two such releases relating to the Second World War. The move followed MI5's decision that it should not hold back personal files that would otherwise be released unless they would cause 'substantive distress' to those involved or their relatives. The material included two files from the First World War, which MI5 had been forced to keep back a year earlier when it released its personal files from that period: that on Mata Hari, the Dutch-born dancer who was executed by the French in 1917 for being a spy for the Germans, and that on Roger Casement, hanged by the British for seeking German support for Irish independence.

The Second World War material included the personal file of Rudolf Hess (issue 58). This produced little that was not already known. An interesting snippet though was the report by MI5's Lieutenant John Mair of his debriefing of Roman Battaglia, a German-speaking clerk at the Polish consulate at Glasgow, who had been called in by the Home Guard to interpret at the first, somewhat chaotic, interrogation of the Deputy Führer, which took place at the 3rd Battalion Renfrewshire Home Guard HQ at Giffnock (see pages 11-13). MI5 was keen to get a record of that interrogation, 'since Hess may have rather let himself go'. However, Battaglia disclosed that Hess, facing a barrage of questions, remained calm and self-controlled. The Pole had asked Hess why he had come. 'I have a message for the Duke of Hamilton.' Asked if he knew the Duke, Hess had replied: 'I saw him at the Olympic Games in Berlin and we have a friend in common.' Battaglia's impromptu conversation with Hess so incensed MI5 that it called for an official inquiry. An irate high-ranking official wrote: 'How on earth he got to know of Hess's arrival and, furthermore, went out and interrogated him for over two hours I simply cannot conceive.'



The mortuary at the Cemeterio de la Solidaridad in Huelva, where the post-mortem of 'Major Martin' was conducted.

More interesting was the released material on the 13 German spies executed in Britain during the war, and the file of the one female German agent, Vera Erikson — ‘Vera, the Beautiful Spy’ as we know her (issue 11).

Though large tracts of it have been removed, the file on Vera revealed many personal details not known before. Born in Kiev on December 10, 1912, almost certainly illegitimately and of Jewish origin, she was adopted and, after the Bolshevik revolution, moved to Denmark with her new parents. At the age of 15, she ran away to Paris where she joined a Russian ballet company, studying under the famous ballerina Anna Pavlova. A few years later, she married Count Ignatieff, a White Russian working as a Soviet spy. The couple lived together for only one year, though they stayed in contact after separation. Six years on, in a fit of jealousy, Ignatieff stabbed Vera in the chest. At this point the German Abwehr stepped in, hoping to recruit her as a ‘mole’ in Soviet intelligence. By now living in Brussels, she married her Abwehr contact, von Wedel, almost certainly bigamously. She was sent to Britain, acquiring a number of lovers, and then returned to Germany. There she began an affair with Karl Drugge, which resulted in her becoming pregnant. Landed in Britain with Drugge (Karl Drücke) and Robert Petti (Werner Walti) on September 30, 1940, and arrested that same day, she lost the baby when she had a miscarriage not long after. Detained at Holloway prison without a trial, she was not executed because MI5 believed she was another Mata Hari who might be useful to them. MI5 had Vera’s handwriting examined by a graphologist who concluded: ‘The writer is cold and calculating, very selfish and hard.’ She had told ‘a great many social lies’ and had suffered ‘a great erotic disappointment’. Yet, from the file it is clear that many of her MI5 captors were very impressed by Vera’s beauty, tragic past and sad vulnerability and — almost to a man — fell under her spell. She was treated with astonishing indulgence, MI5 buying her a whole wardrobe of new clothes, high MI5 officials taking an interest in her well-being, and one (unidentified) interrogator even taking her out of internment to live at his Gloucestershire home. Repatriated to Germany in October 1945, Vera was freed after a muddle at her detention centre, after which MI5 apparently lost track of her. Thus the file fails to confirm what Günter Peis, author of *They Spied on England*, communicated to us in 1978: that she had died after remarrying in Belgium (see issue 25, page 12). On the other hand, the file does include the official police photographs of Vera, the first pictures of her we have seen.

Turning from German spies to Soviet spies, our story on Sonia’s Dubok (issue 104) prompted a letter from Anthony George Burnett from Birmingham who questioned why ‘Elli’ was not identified from intercepted radio messages. ‘Certainly one must ask how an illegal radio transmitter could have operated for very long in wartime Britain. If she was transmitting directly to Moscow, she would have needed a much more powerful transmitter than a German spy because of the greater distance. Would it not have been safer for her to have gone by train to London, and left the information in a dubok there? We now know of five spies, but how many more were there who are still not publicly known?’

We passed Mr Burnett’s letter to John Howland, the author of our Sonia story, and quote from his reply:

‘Sonia’s transmissions were indeed intercepted throughout the war featuring heavily in what has since become known as the Venona Decrypts. Many of these decodes are freely available on the Internet — just type in “Venona”. But importantly, throughout the time-span of her transmissions, her (one-time pad) codes were unbreakable.



Released by MI5 after 57 years: the first portraits of Vera Erikson. (PRO)

‘In the immediate post-war period (and following a serious lapse in Soviet radio security) the brilliant American cryptanalyst, Meredith Gardner, began making inroads into the Soviet codes. It was these decrypts that led the FBI and MI5 to Klaus Fuchs’ eventual unmasking.

‘You ask how an illegal transmitter could have operated for so long, undetected, in wartime Britain? Sonia operated as “illegal” up until the Nazi invasion of Soviet Russia in 1941, after which Churchill regarded the Soviets as allies and, suspending all further radio surveillance of their wireless traffic, diverted every effort in radio surveillance towards breaking German wireless codes. She went about her business virtually unmo- lested.

‘I take your point about her using a more powerful transmitter than of the kind supplied to German agents. I rather suspect that if she had been unable to reach Moscow, then a third party relayed her radio traffic for her from perhaps the London Soviet embassy or maybe Finland or Switzerland. Not being a radio expert, I imagine her transmitter would have had a range of about 500 miles.

‘The importance of the location of the dubok is two-fold. Not only did the location have to be convenient for her, but also for “Elli”. Sonia made many trips to London to meet her controller, recording in her memoirs that she hated the experience — often being mistaken for prostitute touting for custom as she waited her “Sergei”.

‘I cannot answer your last questions as to how many more spies remain undetected or unknown to the public. How could I? But, in the wake of Philby, Burgess, Maclean, Blunt and Cairncross, “Elli” would have been a good fit for the Sixth Man, or woman?’

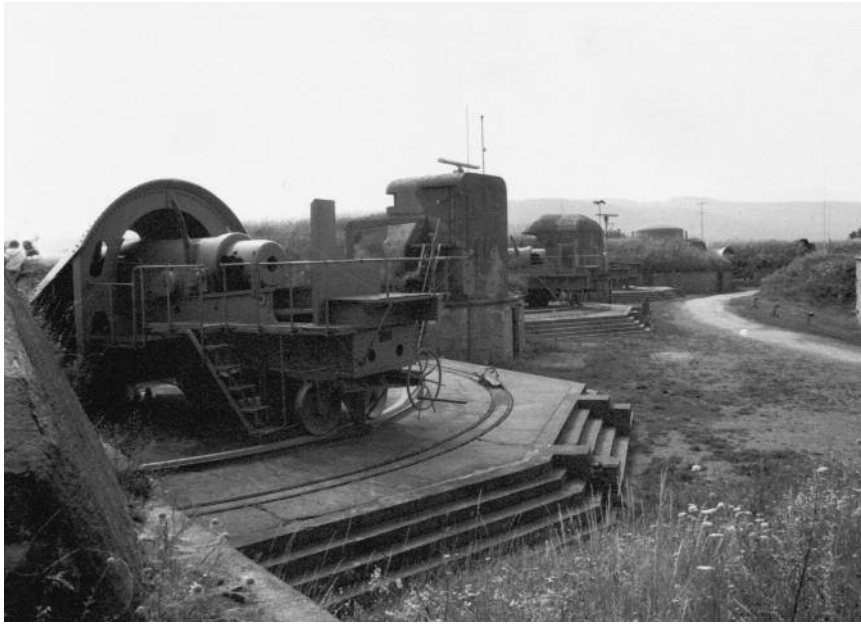
John’s closing observations became of course very pertinent with the news in September 1999 that the so-called Mitrokhin archive (the files of KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin who defected to the West in 1992) had revealed the existence of several previously unknown Soviet spies in Britain. At least one of whom — Melita Norwood — had been recruited before the Second World War and been active for some 35 years, making her the longest-serving of all Soviet spies in Britain.

Born in 1912 (like Vera Erikson!) and a secret member of the British Communist Party since 1936, she was recruited by the NKVD (the KGB’s predecessor) in 1937, when she was 25. Employed as a secretary with the British Non-Ferrous Metals Research Association — the co-ordinating body for the British nuclear research programme — for years she stealthily removed and photographed top-secret documents, including many on the wartime US-British ‘Tube Alloys’ (atomic weapons) project (see issue 41), and passed them to her Soviet controllers. Her information decisively speeded up development of the Soviet Union’s own atomic bomb which was ready by 1949. Norwood (who operated under the code-name ‘Hola’) continued spying for the KGB until her retirement in 1972, being awarded the KGB’s highest decoration, the Order of the Red Banner, in 1958 and receiving a small KGB pension after 1960.

Analyzing the Mitrokhin files, MI5 had discovered in 1994 that Norwood had been a spy, but decided to not to take any action against her in order not to compromise their source. When her past was finally revealed in September 1999, Mrs Norwood, by then a frail old lady of 87, freely admitted that she had been a spy for the Soviet Union. Reading out a statement to the Press from her garden in Bexleyheath, south London, she said she was still a convinced Communist and had no regrets. A ruling by Home Secretary Jack Straw that she would not be prosecuted because of her age provoked a political row, opponents arguing that treachery should never be forgiven.



A former Soviet spy confesses her treason. Melita Norwood, 87, reading her statement to the Press from her garden at Bexleyheath.



The guns that really did fire at the German cruiser *Blücher*: the 28cm Krupp guns of Main Battery at Oscarsborg Fortress, photographed by Svein Wiiger Olsen.

Our story on the sinking of the German heavy cruiser *Blücher* (issue 101) provoked a critical letter from one of our Norwegian readers, Svein Wiiger Olsen of Drammen, who is a fortification and artillery enthusiast and the present chairman of the Norwegian Fort Group:

'1. The picture [on page 44] of the author in front of a gun does not show one of the guns of the Main Battery which fired at *Blücher*. The gun shown is a 26.7cm Armstrong RML from the early 1870s! There are three such guns preserved at Oscarsborg Fortress at the East Shore Battery. The RMLs had not been manned since 1917!

'2. Between 1814 and 1905 Sweden and Norway were united. The Union was a result of the Napoleonic Wars. The two countries had the same king but both countries had their own National Assembly and Government. So it is hardly correct to write [on page 45] that Norway was ruled by Sweden! It is a fact that in the years leading up to the dissolution of the Union in 1905 the Norwegian National Assembly considerably strengthened our armed forces as a preparation for a possible war with Sweden.

'3. The three 28cm Krupp guns of the Main Battery were named Moses (the left-hand gun), Aron, and Josva (the right-hand gun). A proper translation of the name Josva is Joshua — not Joseph! The fourth gun in the Main Battery is the 30.5cm Krupp gun from the late 1870s. Due to its age this gun is named Metusalem (i.e. Methuselah). The 28cm gun No. 3 fell into the water when being unloaded in Kristiania (later renamed Oslo). Like Moses in the Bible the gun was picked up from the water and that is the reason for the name. The other two guns probably got their names after 1945.

'4. The name of the battery on the western side of the fjord is not Nesit, but Nesset Battery. In addition to the batteries mentioned in the article there were five other batteries not manned: the Howitzer Battery at Håøya Island (four 28cm Whitworth howitzers); the Lower Top Battery at Håøya Island (eight 12cm converted/Palliser guns); the Upper Top Battery at Håøya Island (two 12cm Armstrong L/40 guns); and two 57mm batteries at the Northern Kaholmen Island. The name of the 15cm battery to the north of Drøbak village is Kopås Battery. It was armed with three 15cm Armstrong L/47.5 guns dating from 1899.

'5. The Northern Kaholmen Island [page

46] is very close to the Southern Kaholmen Island. The islands are in fact connected by a little bridge.

'6. The Torpedo Battery there was armed with 45cm (i.e. 18-inch) Whitehead torpedoes. It was a sub-sea battery and difficult to locate from the surface.'

We are always grateful to readers for bringing any errors to our attention and we were also called to task over a couple of captions, one by our very own Bart Vanderveen! Bart, Editor of *Wheels & Tracks*, sent a note to say that 'the car on page 43 and another on page 44 in our story on the French Resistance (issue 105) is not German but a 1936/37 Renault Celtaquat. The registration number prefix "ZF" indicates "Zivilverwaltung Frankreich", denoting the German Civil Administration of France (1943-45), except

northern France which (together with occupied Belgium) had prefix "ZB".'

Then Thomas Young of Corte Madera, California, spotted an error in our article on the Soviet-German war in the Arctic (issue 99): 'The aircraft in the photo at the bottom of page 16 is described as a P-40 Tomahawk, one of 247 supplied to the USSR. In fact, it is a Curtiss P40E Warhawk, a later and quite different variant of the P-40. A total of 2,397 Tomahawks and Warhawks were supplied to the Soviets during the war. Aside from P40Bs, Cs and Es, at least one P-40K was converted to two-seat configuration by the Soviets.'

Jean Paul Marchal, our Belgian contributor (and author of 'The Battle for Wetteren Bridge' in this issue) asked us to correct a mistake we made with one of the illustrations in his story of 'The Desert Rats at Ghent' (issue 94): the picture at page 43, top, of Sergeant Watkins negotiating with the German Feldwebel is printed back to front.

In another letter, Jean Paul also corrected John Quinn on the number of Belgian infantry brigades sent to Northern Ireland for training (issue 100, page 33). There were not four, but five: the 2nd (known as 'Yser') with HQ at Drumafarragh House, Antrim; the 3rd ('Rumbeke') with HQ near White Abbey, Antrim; the 4th ('Steenstraete') at Banbridge, Down; the 5th ('Merckem' — not 'Mere Kems') at Stramore House, Armagh; and the 6th ('Deynze') at Lisburn, Antrim.

Dilip Sarkar of Worcester (author of our 'Guards VC — Blitzkrieg 1940' story in issue 104) wrote to correct us on what we had written in connection with his on-going efforts to find the wreckage of Douglas Bader's Spitfire in France (issue 100, page 34): 'DB's artificial legs were not left behind in the cockpit as per Brickhill. (Why oh why do people insist upon quoting *Reach for the Sky* which is about 50 per cent fairy tale?) Only one leg was left behind but this actually freed itself and fluttered down to be collected by French peasants and handed in to the German authorities. Unfortunately, therefore, no such find awaits the eventual discoverer of this particular WW2 "Holy grail". Dilip is still looking for the crash site, so we await further news from him.



On Jersey in the Channel Islands, the 15cm SK L/45 gun barrel recovered by Terry O'Brien in 1992 (see issue 80, pages 24-25) has now been re-installed on the central gun platform of Noirmont Point Battery on a mounting which looks almost like an original, designed and put together by Terry and Martyn Garnier with help from many Occupation Society volunteers. Terry is now planning to recover another barrel.



RAF personnel walk away as Admiral Ramsay's Hudson taxis to the runway at Toussus-le-Noble, minutes before the aircraft will crash. Russell Smith recognised the man with the fire-pump as his colleague, Air Frame Mechanic Jock Buchanan. (IWM)

In issue 87, we told the story of the death of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief who perished in an aircraft accident at Toussus-le-Noble aerodrome near Paris on January 2, 1945. We were therefore very interested to receive a letter from Russell Smith of Washington, DC. A Briton by birth (he moved to the US in 1959), Mr Smith served in the Fleet Air Arm:

'I was one of the ground crew on that fatal day, as a first-class mechanic (airframes). I was one of the chaps who had laboriously worked to get the ice off the plane with a broom and anything else we could find. We had very little equipment and the step ladders we had barely reached the mainplanes. I know we all did our best in the freezing temperature. As I recall, I had slipped back to our rat-infested hut to try to thaw my hands by the stove. After a brief period I went to rejoin the rest, and by that time the Hudson was taxiing to the left to get onto the runway for take-off. I remember standing almost behind Lieutenant Sharp as we watched the take-off. It seemed as if the engines were labouring as it took off. Then it veered to the left, and the left wingtip struck the ground and it burst into a sheet of orange flame. At that moment Lieutenant Sharp shouted "Christ Sir George!" We were all stunned and instinctively ran towards the ploughed field where it came down. The Americans were there ahead of us with a truck, putting out the flames. When we reached the crash scene, all that was left of the plane was the empennage up to the semi-round door which contained parachutes. Beyond that the plane was burning fiercely. I saw two bodies in the flames. I thought one was my pal, Petty Officer Telegraphist/Air Gunner Taffy Morgan, with whom I had been "out on the town" the evening before. Two people were thrown clear of the crash. One was the pilot, Sir George Lewis, lying flat on his back with no visible injuries. The other was Admiral Ramsay, who was still strapped to his seat, with the top of his head cleaved off, poor chap. One could see through his eyeholes and his brains were scattered all over the ground. A very sad occasion which I will never forget. They were all very well liked and it was a very sad day for all of us. The engines were intact and later were hauled away. I, with other members of the ground crew, went to an inquiry at St Germain, in a chateau, where we were interrogated by a board of officers, with a Wren script-writer. Later on we were

flown to HMS *Daedalus*, Lee-on-Solent, for another enquiry, which we did not attend as we heard that it was determined that it was pilot's error on take-off.

'I was assigned with three others of "X" Flight to attend a course on Dakotas at Croydon Airport. Then we returned to Toussus-le-Noble (A-45 as the Americans called it) and finally we ended up at Wunstorf in Germany, before being demobilized in 1946.

'In the pictures, I was only able to identify Lieutenant Tolley, Lieutenant Bret, Pilot Officer Bill Stokes and Jock Buchanan, the Scot with the fire-pump standing by the aircraft before take-off, who was an airframe mechanic, like myself. We were at Mont-St-Michel in Brittany, before moving to Toussus-le-Noble.'



Brenda Price.

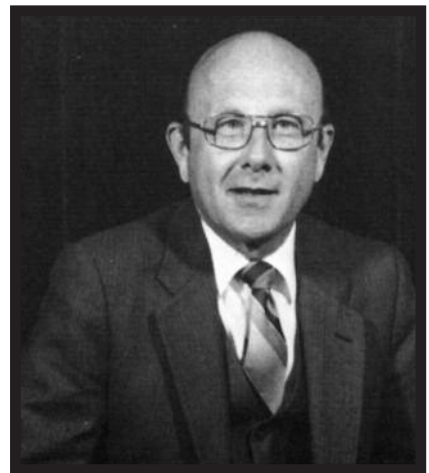
It is always a very sad duty to report the death of people associated with *After the Battle*. In December 1998 came the news of the passing of Brenda Price. As our readers may recall, Brenda was the daughter of Sergeant Harold Chandler, who was one of the victims when Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory's Avro York aircraft crashed in the Alps in 1944 (issue 39). In issue 98, she described in her own delightful way her experiences at the unveiling of the memorial to this 'Forgotten Crash' at Le Revier d'Allemont.



Ian Galbraith.

A death that came as a particular shock was that of Ian Galbraith, author of our story on the capture of Boulogne (issue 86), for it was the first time to our knowledge that a contributor to *After the Battle* died as a result of homicide. Ian — 37, a police officer with the Metropolitan Police for 16 years who had moved to Scotland in 1996 where he was a Constable with Strathclyde Police — was shot through the head with a hunting rifle by his wife Kim as he lay asleep in their cottage in Furnace, Argyll, on January 13, 1999. Kim Galbraith initially tried to trick the police into believing that her husband had been killed by two masked intruders after one of them had raped her. To substantiate her story, she had deliberately created disorder in the cottage, hidden valuables away, bruised herself and cut up her underwear. However, in a later police interview, she confessed to the killing. At the trial held at Glasgow High Court in May-June, the 30-year-old widow was sentenced to life imprisonment, the jury rejecting her claim that years of sexual abuse by her husband had driven her to the limit of sanity.

We were also sad to learn of the death of Ben Swearingen of Lewisville, Texas, who



Ben Swearingen.

died of a brain tumour on January 27, 1998. Ben was a keen collector of WW2 memorabilia and wrote to us many times (see issue 31, pages 50-52) before authoring the story on Göring's suicide (issue 44), which he later expanded into a book, *The Mystery of Hermann Göring's Suicide*. In professional life, Ben was a teacher — he retired in 1997 as principal of Arbor Creek Middle School. We understand his unique collection of artifacts — which included many personal items of Hitler and Göring — has been put up for auction.

With the move of the German federal government from Bonn to Berlin in August 1999, Germany has passed another historic milestone. Meanwhile, the transformation of Berlin continues at a rapid pace. In June 1999, the German parliament voted to build a huge memorial in the heart of Berlin to the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust, thus ending an anguished debate about the desirability and design of such a memorial that had been going on for nearly ten years. The winning design — 2,700 concrete pillars of varying height, said to resemble a Jewish cemetery — is by American architect Peter Eisenman. The memorial will cover an area the size of two football fields just south of the Brandenburg Gate and just north of the site of Hitler's bunker.

The Führerbunker made a short re-appearance in the media when construction workers uncovered part of the buried structure in October 1999 — which led some ill-informed British newspapers to report that Hitler's bunker had been 'discovered'. This was of course patent nonsense as the workers knew exactly what to expect, the bunker having been first uncovered, partially demolished, and then buried again by the GDR authorities in 1988, and then thoroughly surveyed by the Monuments and Conservation Office of the Berlin Senate in 1990 (see issues 61 and 62). The present work was in connection with the building of new housing for the *Ländervertretungen* (representatives of the German provinces) in Berlin. As part of this, the whole area around the remains of the bunker was dug up to make sure there was no live ordnance left in the soil, after which everything was levelled off again. The bunker itself will not be built over, though future plans are for a street to run over the site.

The tale of Martin Bormann, Hitler's secretary and chief of the NSDAP Chancellery, has now finally been laid to rest. In May 1998, it was announced that DNA tests had proven for certain that the skull found beside the Invalidenstrasse in Berlin in 1965 (see issue 100, page 42 and *Berlin Then and Now*, page 267) was definitely that of Bormann. Thus, the forensic examination of 1973-74, which had already established the skull as Bormann's from his dental records, was vindicated and the myth that Bormann had escaped from Berlin proved to be false. Then in late August 1999, the German government announced that the ashes of Bormann's remains had been scattered over the Baltic Sea earlier that month — a deliberate move to avoid any grave becoming a shrine for neo-Nazis.



The transformation of Berlin under way. This aerial photograph taken in March 1998 shows the cleared area just south of the Brandenburg Gate, the upper one-third of which will be the site of the national memorial to the Jewish victims of Nazism. At the top of the picture, Behrenstrasse has been extended through from the right to link up with Ebertstrasse (the former Hermann Göring Strasse). Just discernable at the top of the site on the left are the remains of Goebbels' bunker in what was the garden of the Food and Agriculture Ministry. Goebbels' villa lay to the left of that. Next below is the Reich President's garden, then the remains of buildings built between 1939-44 to house various adjutants, with their air-raid shelter in the centre of the picture. The lower half covers the Reich Chancellery garden, with the foundations of the barrack blocks on the left and the underground garages and workshops. On the right the foundations of the Orangerie, also known as Hitler's Palm Tree House. (Wulf/Jola)



Goebbels' bunker pictured by Tony Le Tissier. Uncovered in early 1988, it has now been buried under sand again.



The USS *Missouri* arrives at Pearl Harbor, June 21, 1998. Tugs ease 'Mighty Mo' alongside F-5 pier, Ford Island, after her long tow from Astoria, Oregon. At upper right is the USS *Arizona* Memorial. (US Navy)

Turning to the war in the Pacific, the recent past saw the last voyage of two of America's most-famous battleships of the Second World War: the USS *Missouri* and the USS *New Jersey*. On June 21, 1998, the *Missouri* (BB-63) arrived at its final anchoring place at Pearl Harbor. 'Mighty Mo' now lies at birth at Ford Island, its 16-inch guns pointing towards the USS *Arizona*, the sunken memorial to the Americans who died during the Japanese attack of December 7, 1941. It is fitting that the two ships should end up next to each other: the *Arizona* was sunk at the beginning of the US-Japanese conflict (see issue 38) and it was aboard the *Missouri* that the Japanese signed their surrender four years later (issue 50).

Built by the New York Navy Yard and commissioned on June 11, 1944, the *Missouri* was the last battleship launched by the United States. It took part in the invasions of Okinawa, Iwo Jima, Corregidor, and attacks on the Japanese homeland. After the war, most of the US battleships were scrapped or used as targets in atomic tests, and of the 4,500-ton Iowa-class ships only the *Missouri*, *New Jersey*, *Iowa* and *Wisconsin* were saved. In 1955, having served in the Korean war, the *Missouri* was put into the mothball fleet at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard at Bremerton (see issue 12). Recommissioned in 1986, and equipped with Tomahawk cruise missiles, the ship fought in the 1990-91 Gulf War, after which it was decommissioned again in 1992. A number of US cities — Bremerton; Oahu on Hawaii; and Long Beach and San Francisco in California — wanted to claim the battleship, but in the end the Navy donated it to the Honolulu-based USS *Missouri* Memorial Association. A number of veteran organisations objected to the *Missouri* being put so near the sacred *Arizona*, but the Navy stuck to its decision. On January 29, 1999 — 55 years to the day after it was launched — the ship was officially opened to the public as a floating museum.

Then in July 1999, again after a strong competition between several cities, it was decided that the USS *New Jersey* (BB-62) should go to the state after which it is named, to be used as a floating museum and memorial. The 'Big J' left Bremerton on September 12, being towed down the West Coast, through the Panama Canal, and then up the East Coast, reaching Philadelphia Navy Yard's Pier No. 4 on November 11. This will be its temporary berth, awaiting the US Navy's Ship Donation Program's decision on her permanent New Jersey mooring.

With 16 battle stars awarded to it, the *New Jersey* is the most-decorated ship in US naval history. Launched at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard on December 7, 1942, it fought in

many Pacific war campaigns and battles including the assaults on the Marshall, Marianas and Western Caroline Islands, Leyte, Luzon, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. After 1945, it fought in the Korean war, Vietnam and the 1983-84 Lebanon mission, being finally decommissioned in February 1991.

It remains to be seen what will happen to the last two battleships now left on the US Navy's roll: the *Iowa* and the *Wisconsin*. The US Congress requires that one remain in 'reserve status', freeing the other one for museumhood. After having lost the competition for the *Missouri* and the *New Jersey*, San Francisco's 'Historic Ships Memorial at Pacific Square' organisation is now campaigning to get the *Iowa* for their city.



USS *New Jersey*'s homecoming. On November 11, 1999, the famous battleship moored at Philadelphia Navy Yard, New Jersey, after an eight-week journey from Bremerton.



Tarawa . . . then and now. The march of time on Betio atoll, documented by Jack Haden. The Sherman off Red Beach 2 still survives, though now utterly bogged down in deep sand. Compare with issue 15, page 16.



The Japanese pillbox at Temakin Point (page 18, top) has now completely fallen apart. The 8-inch coastal gun in the background (page 17) remains intact. Jack comments that this area is now being used as a local rubbish dump.

Back in 1977 (issue 15), we told the story of Operation 'Galvanic' and the assault on the Central Pacific atoll of Tarawa by the 2nd Marine Division in November 1943. Pacific islands are not easily re-visited, so we were very glad to receive a letter from Jack Haden of Ryde, New South Wales, Australia, which gives a good indication of the changes that have occurred since William Bartsch visited the atoll for us in 1974. Mr Haden writes: 'Over the past 16 years I have been visiting Tarawa and lived there on Betio, where the battle was fought, for two years in the period 1992-94 and as a result plotted many of the existing relics and photographed them. Recently I returned from two weeks on Tarawa (August 1998) and I took many more photographs of the relics.'

'The war relics on Betio are fast disappearing due to the increased pressure on land and resources as a result of a population explosion on this tiny islet. Many of the landing craft and amtrac remains on Red Beach 3 are now gone as they are buried under land fill due to the construction of a new container wharf during 1998. Red Beach 2 is also being used for waste disposal and domestic garbage land fill has already covered some relics on the beach during 1996 to 1998. Memorial Park is now under threat with nearly one third of its land being reclaimed for container vehicle parking. The Vickers 8-inch coastal defence gun at Temakin Point, although restored and foundations secured in 1992 is now in danger of collapsing in the sea as high tides slowly erode its base. Rear Admiral Shibasaki's command bunker is now closed off to the public and cannot be entered as a locked eight-foot-high fence surrounds it. In 1992 there were moves made to



An aid grant by the South Pacific Tourism Commission allowed the eight-inch gun at Takarongo Point (page 19) to be partially restored and remounted, but the sea is already eroding the restored base.

turn it into a WW2 museum but nothing became of it. Many land relics, concrete bunkers and gun mounts, are now hard to find as housing development has now surrounded them and without local knowledge

are very hard to find. The Kiribati government does very little to preserve the relics and cites no funds available or little interest from government officials to warrant their preserving.'



Left: The aircraft wreck off Betio beach (page 24) has disintegrated further. Right: The 127mm twin-mount gun on the



ocean side of Betio — still standing in 1974 (page 25, top right) — has now virtually disappeared below the sand.

We will remember them. Exactly 59 years after they became the first casualties of the Blitz, Frederic and Dorothy Gill were given proper recognition by the marking of their grave with a CWGC-type headstone. Right: Preparations by Stephen Haste of Masters in Burrs Road Cemetery.

And finally . . . some ten years ago, when we carried out research for *The Blitz Then and Now*, we found that three significant graves were not marked in any way: that of the first casualties in England — Mr and Mrs Frederick Gill at Clacton; the first person killed in the Greater London Area — Fireman Jim Roberts; and the last civilian to be killed by enemy action — Ivy Millichamp in Orpington, Kent.

Once we discover such an omission, we cannot just walk away and leave it, so in several cases in the past we have arranged to have Commonwealth War Graves Commission-pattern headstones erected (see issue 101). In the case of Jim Roberts and Ivy Millichamp, this was carried out during publication phase of *The Blitz* but in that of Mr and Mrs Gill it could not be done because of the difficulty of tracing the grave owner. Now, thanks to the strenuous efforts of Jim Richmond of Wilsden near Bradford, the position has been rectified.

The Gills were killed on April 30, 1940 when a Heinkel 111 was brought down on



their house in Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, by anti-aircraft fire (see *The Blitz*, Volume 1, page 79). They were buried locally in Burrs Road Cemetery but the grave in Plot R was never marked. Jim was very concerned when he read of the omission and in 1994 he set out on his personal crusade to get the grave marked. After many months of research he eventually received permission to do so from the son of the Gill's executor whom he traced residing in Norfolk.

Jim got in touch with us and we agreed to fund the cost of the headstone which was hand-carved by Hilary Wells of Masters in Woodbridge, Suffolk, and at 2 p.m. on Friday, April 30, 1999 — the 59th anniversary of the deaths — the Reverend Denis Hart performed a short dedication to ensure that the high price paid by Mr and Mrs Gill — amongst the first of more than 60,000 civilians killed in Britain during the Second World War — will not be forgotten.

Below: The Reverend Dennis Hart leads the dedication ceremony on April 30, 1999. Right: A duty of honour fulfilled . . . your Editor-in-Chief with Jim Richmond.



Commemorating the dead . . . and redressing the balance. One aspect of life during the Blitz which has not yet been given due attention is the role of the Ambulance Service and, in particular, the mainly female-staffed London Auxiliary Ambulance Service, so *After the Battle* have now redressed the situation with the publication of Angela Raby's *The Forgotten Service*. Focused on Auxiliary Ambulance Station 39 in Weymouth Mews in the West End of London, it was during Angela's research that she made an amazing discovery. In the 1980s, the self-styled secret agent Josephine Butler (left) claimed in her book *Churchill's Secret Agent* that she was one of the Prime Minister's 'secret circle' of 12 selected intelligence agents responsible only to him. Her claims were challenged and shown to be ridiculous but the proof of her true wartime role was lacking . . . that is until now, for Angela has proved that Josephine Butler was none other than the commanding officer of Station 39 (right) dismissed ignominiously in 1942 and then later in 1944 convicted and imprisoned for fraud!





Below left: Broekhuizen is a small village on the west bank of the River Maas in south-eastern Holland. It was one of three positions where in October-November 1944 the Germans maintained bridgeheads across the Maas, designed to obstruct Allied attempts to cross the river and at the same time serve as springboards for possible future offensives. (The other two were at Blerick, 15 kilometres to the south, and at Castle Geysteren, 15 kilometres to the north.) Broekhuizen had been turned into a veritable fortress, with an elaborate trench system, minefields and artillery back-up from across the river.

Above: 'Brückenkopf Broekhuizen' was held by the 6. Kompanie (Leutnant Lampersbach) of Fallschirmjäger-Regiment 20, part of the 7. Fallschirmjäger-Division. The main strong point inside the Broekhuizen bridgehead was the local castle, consisting of a manor house (parts of which date back to the 15th century) with an adjoining farm. Surrounded on three sides by a water-filled moat, with walls three feet thick, and clear fields of fire, it was an almost impregnable redoubt. A mere 15 young Fallschirmjäger held the building, but they inflicted terrible casualties on their British attackers.

THE BATTLE OF BROEKHUIZEN

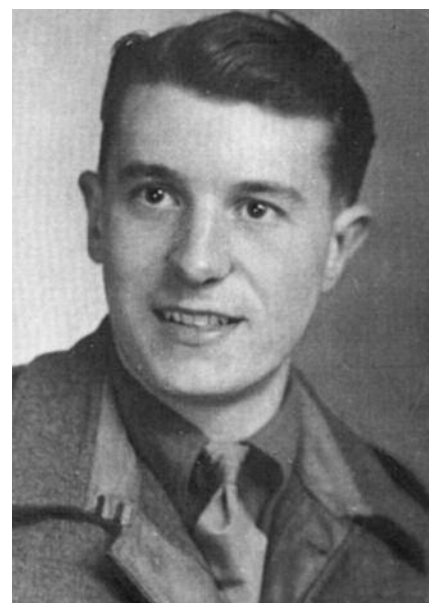
By John Gaunt



The 3rd Battalion Monmouthshire Regiment (part of 11th Armoured Division) had rested from fighting for three days in the Dutch village of Asten. On November 26, 1944, the battalion received orders to take up defensive positions near Broekhuizen where the Germans maintained a tiny foothold on the west bank of the Maas river. No. 18 Platoon with the rest of D Company, finally took over these positions south of Broekhuizen from the 9th Battalion Cameronians on the 28th. We occupied the existing slit trenches.

The rain that night was torrential and as the hours went by, we all got soaked to the skin. It seemed like nothing that we carried would keep out the rain. It was pitch black and eerie. We were cold, wet and thoroughly miserable in these new positions. Sleep was impossible!

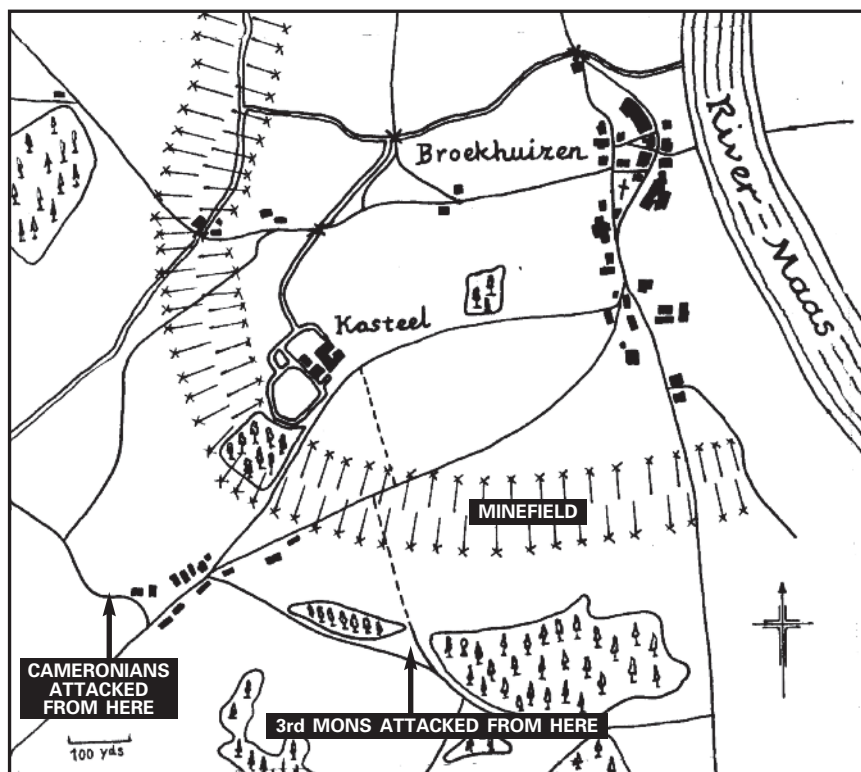
The day of the 29th was spent drying out and preparing our weapons and ammunition for an attack the next day. Among the ranks, target and objective information was scarce. Rumours rife! However, once in action, the target was always obvious, with our previous training and discipline carrying us forward. The night proved to be another sleepless one. A high state of alert was observed for any enemy patrolling.



A veteran remembers. Our author John Gaunt as he looked in 1944, a private with the 3rd Monmouthshires.

One day before the 3rd Monmouths relieved the 9th Cameronians at Broekhuizen (part of the 15th Scottish Division handing over the sector to the 11th Armoured Division), the Cameronians battalion commander had tried to take the castle by sending a lone platoon against it. Preceded by a few Royal Engineers to lift the mines, and creeping through a drainage ditch, the platoon got to within 30 yards of the castle, but as soon as they emerged in the open they were mowed down by machine-gun fire, then hit by artillery from east of the river. Of 32 men, five were killed, 11 taken prisoner, some eight were wounded and only eight men returned unhurt. This bloody débâcle warned the 3rd Monmouths to plan its attack more carefully.

The following morning, D Company was moved forward into open ground as reserve for an attack on the village. The rumour was that, apart from a minefield between the battalion and the village, the enemy were not in any great strength. This gave cause for the optimistic belief that the company — as reserve — might not have to engage the enemy. When taking up these new positions, I learned that a new reinforcement, Private Hugh Bosanko, had been killed during the night of 28/29th manning an outpost of B Company. Hugh had befriended me when joining our battalion in Astén. Within hours, his first engagement in the line was his last! We were not even in action; he was 18 years old.



On the morning of November 30, the 3rd Mons assembled behind woods some 700 yards to the south of Broekhuizen. A Company was to attack the castle, and C Company the village, with D Company waiting in reserve. (B Company was holding the village of Lottum, six kilometres to the south.) Some 30 tanks — B and C Squadrons of the 15th/19th Hussars — were

to support the attack with fire from the edge of the woods. The infantry would be further protected by a smoke screen and artillery. The attack was launched through this narrow gap in the wood line. The castle lies in the distance on the left (today hidden by the copse) and the village still further away on the right (beyond the farm buildings).

Despite the optimism, I was beginning to get the feeling that all was not well. We dug small individual slit trenches as a matter of course on our reserve area. The rain had stopped. At that stage, we had no idea of what to expect from the enemy defences. After a short while in these positions, we heard the sound of heavy tanks and, through a gap in the woods in front of us, saw our 'flail' tanks beating a path through the minefield. Other companies of the battalion strung out behind were heading toward what at first seemed to be a big house.

To clear paths through the minefield, the Monmouths had been assigned 12 'Flail' tanks from A Squadron of the Westminster Dragoons (from the 79th Armoured Division). The Flails moved out in teams of three, with the infantry following behind them in long files. Although they opened gaps in the minefield, several of the Flails bogged down and one — that of Lieutenant Sam Hall of No. 4 Troop, beating a path towards the village — was knocked out by a Panzerfaust. Today it stands in the Overloon War Museum (see *After the Battle* No. 9).



As soon as they lost the cover afforded by the Flails, the heavily-laden infantrymen came under murderous automatic fire from the castle. Pinned down in the open, A and C Companies were decimated, 70 per cent becoming casualties. The A Company commander, Major Thomas Nodwell, was killed, as were all the other company officers except one, who was wounded. C Company's attack bled to death at the southern end of the village, the OC, Major Gilbert Hall, being among those killed. The battalion CO, Lieutenant-Colonel Ralph Stockley, who had rushed forward when the attack stalled and communications failed, was killed on the castle's moat bridge, leading a futile charge. Both because of the tactics used — heavily-laden infantry in frontal attack over open ground — and the high percentage of casualties, Broekhuizen has been likened to the first day on the Somme, July 1, 1916.

This movement of our tanks and infantry suddenly triggered a tremendous hail of machine-gun fire from the 'house' that we now know as the 'Kasteel'. Simultaneously, a hail of shells and mortars began to fall among the attacking companies and onto our reserve area. It was continuous and unrelenting. I crouched as low as possible in my shallow slit trench being constantly showered with earth and stones from close explosions. There were constant calls for 'Stretcher Bearers' for the numerous casualties but because of their constant exposure, the stretcher bearers themselves were becoming casualties.

Through all this, it wasn't possible to know what was happening to the attack. It was frightening and lonely pressed close to the earth waiting for the direct hit which I felt must surely come; such was the intensity of the bombardment. After what seemed like several hours word came that we were to prepare to continue the attack with tank support. Within a short time, several of our tanks appeared on the scene firing over our heads into the Kasteel and the roofs of houses in Broekhuizen.

Under cover of this fire, with the rest of my platoon, I ran across several hundred yards of open ground, covered in thick mud, toward the Kasteel. During this run, we were subjected to a continuous hail of 88mm shells, mortars and machine-gun fire. Our tanks began to bring intense artillery and machine-gun fire on to the Kasteel which allowed us to make this progress. During my run, I had to follow the same tracks that the flail tanks had made through the minefields. These tracks were littered with the bodies of



Not until 1450 hours, after supporting tanks — which advanced almost up to the walls — and artillery had pummelled the castle to ruins, and forced the handful of defenders into the cellars, did the Germans surrender, emerging under a white flag. This is how the castle and farm looked after the battle.

numerous comrades who had made the first attack having been exposed to murderous automatic fire once the flail tanks had withdrawn. I tripped over one of these bodies, falling to the side of another and looking into half a face with an exposed brain, still wear-

ing his steel helmet at a crazy angle. I felt sick and angry. Still, there was no let-up of the bombardment. Regaining my feet we continued toward the Kasteel but before reaching it, moved right toward the village, with the tanks continuing to attack the Kasteel.



Left: Fifty-five years later, the ruins of the castle still stand, though much reduced and now completely swallowed up by the trees that have sprung up around it. This is the north-eastern corner, the same column being visible in the previous picture. Above: The remains of the moat, looking towards where the moat bridge was.

While the battle for the castle was still going on, D Company, to which John Gaunt belonged, was ordered to take over the attack on the village from C Company. In order to pass through the minefield, they had to first move towards the embattled castle before they could swing right towards the village. Running across the open ground at the double, they rushed past the castle, veered right, and gained the edge of the village, where they waited for the 15th/19th Hussars tanks to catch up. Then they began a systematic clearing of all the buildings. This is Broekhuizen after the battle, as seen from the southern end of the village.

Being loaded with kit and ammunition, the run across open country was exhausting. At the edge of the village, we threw ourselves into a ditch full of water, being the only available cover. Lying there waiting for the tanks to catch up, there was still no relief from the enemy shell-fire. One very loud explosion lifted me off the ground. I felt sure I had been hit. Miraculously, I had not.

As we were given the final order to attack and clear the village, my comrade and friend, Terrence Warrey, alongside me, failed to move. In turning his body, it seemed he had taken the full force of the explosion that had lifted me and was sliced open from his neck to his stomach. Everything now was beginning to seem unreal. I hadn't any idea what time it was or what day it was. It felt I had descended into hell.

As the tanks came alongside, we rose and dashed into the village by the church. The first thing I noticed when running past the church was a huge statue of Jesus covered with bullet holes. Logically, it was a stone statue but its symbolism affected me greatly. Immediately we entered the village, we were subjected to further intense artillery and mortar fire despite the fact that the enemy were still there in some force. It seemed unbelievable to me that they could bring down this intense fire on their own men. It was only at this time that I realised all their artillery and mortar fire came from across the Maas river and not from Broekhuizen as first thought.

We began the systematic clearing of the houses which were alive with Germans. When approaching one house, a German grenade was dropped at my feet from an upstairs window. Initially transfixed, I quickly came to my senses and dived for the

Right: Lottumseweg today.



Broekhuizen church was heavily damaged in the battle, both the British and Germans bringing down heavy artillery concentrations on the village. To the right, the street leads down to the village ferry. Although this was out of service during the



battle, numerous parties of Germans managed to escape across the river during the night, using boats and dinghies. Several captured British soldiers (some of them wounded) were taken across as well. The 3rd Mons took 112 prisoners.

The 3rd Monmouth battalion was practically wiped out at Broekhuizen: of the 300 men taking part in the attack, 140 had become casualties: 27 killed, the rest wounded or captured. The battalion commander, two company commanders, five other officers and three NCOs were among those killed. D Company had 2 killed and 13 wounded, but A and C Companies, with 70 per cent casualties, had virtually ceased to exist. In 1994, at the 50th anniversary of the battle, a memorial was unveiled against the northern wall of the churchyard, commemorating all the British who died in the liberation of Broekhuizen.

cover of a wall; just in time! Continuing the clearing of each house, in one of these, a grenade was thrown into the cellar before attempting to enter. After the explosion, we rushed into the cellar to find it free of enemy but stocked from floor to ceiling with detonators and ammunition of all types. How that failed to ignite and explode remains a mystery. The roads and spaces between the houses were honeycombed with defensive trenches dug by the Germans, making house to house progress very difficult. Complete clearance was never really achieved. We were continually meeting groups or individual Germans endeavouring to escape detection until nightfall, in order to try and escape across the river under cover of darkness.

Two comrades and myself were given our final objective to occupy and hold one particular house directly facing the river to prevent this escape. First, we had to clear the house, but by this time, fatigue, thirst and hunger were beginning to take its toll, inducing some recklessness. I was about to open the door of the room that overlooked the river, when I was stopped by Corporal Edward Chapman (who later won the Victoria Cross in another battle). He did the correct thing by first lobbing a grenade into the room, an action which should have been automatic on my part. On entering after the explosion, there was the sickening sight of two dead Germans close to a machine gun, set up to fire on the first person to enter that room. But for the quick reaction of Corporal Chapman, that would have been me!

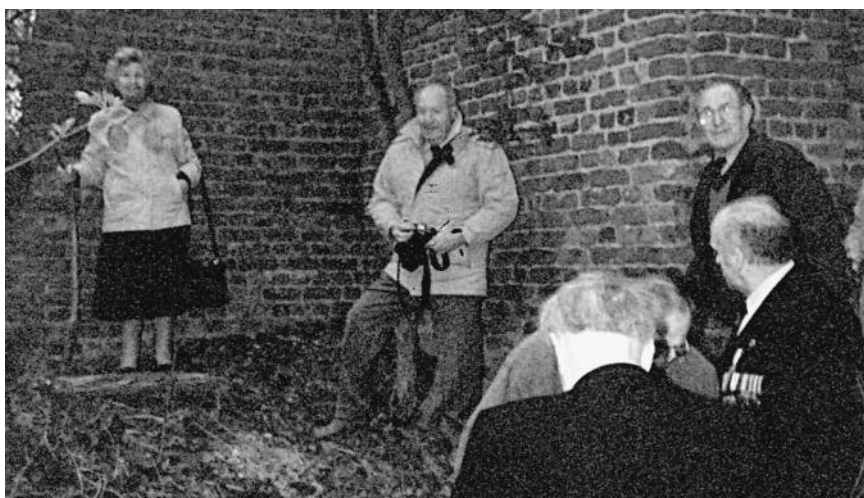
My night was spent in a firing position at the window overlooking the river. The two German bodies remained in the room at my back with the sickening smell of blood filling the room. There was activity the whole of the night, keeping my two comrades and myself in a constant state of alert. We fired at anything that moved or in the direction of anything we heard. It was a most eerie and nerve-wracking experience. Our nerves were frayed and we were physically and mentally shattered. We had not slept for over 48 hours.

I was greatly relieved and somewhat surprised that I had survived to see the dawn the following morning. We spent most of this day organising defences, saddened by the death of so many friends and reflecting on our fortune at finding ourselves still alive. All was not over however, stray Germans were still in the village and active. This fact meant there was no relaxing, the company having to remain in a constant state of alert.

Finally, after dark, the whole battalion was relieved by the 4th King's Shropshire Light Infantry and we marched away from Broekhuizen over fields and ploughed land to a small village some distance away. Even during that journey, we were not completely free of battle. A few shells fell close by our column but without effect other than to further stimulate a high state of nerves. After much stumbling through fatigue and uneven ground, we finally reached the sanctuary of Melderslo to sleep on a wooden floor that felt like a feather bed! The following morning, we buried our dead in the churchyard.



The memorial lists 54 names: 30 men of the 11th Armoured Division, one of the 3rd Division, 11 of the 15th Scottish Division, and 11 RAF airmen (crews from two bombers which crashed near the village on March 13, 1942, and December 11, 1944). Lieutenant G. S. Cooper of No. 2 Troop, Westminster Dragoons (79th Armoured Division) — killed the day after the battle (December 1) while recovering one of the bogged-down Flails — is listed under the 11th Armoured.



Outside the village, the dwindling ruin of the Kasteel stands crumbling and completely overgrown — but the villagers and the veterans remember its history. Here John Gaunt (in light jacket) poses at the ruin during a return visit in 1997.

The Reichstag — then and now. *Above:* Erected beside the Spree river in Berlin in 1894, the German parliament building was set on fire by Marinus van der Lubbe in 1933, becoming

the focus of the Soviet attack on the German capital 12 years later. *Below:* Now, with the transformation of Berlin, a road tunnel is being driven across the former battlefield.

And the magnificent dome on the Reichstag roof — scene of the symbolic flag-raising by the Soviets on April 30, 1945. With some £200 million being spent on converting the restored building into

the new Bundestag in anticipation of the move of the German Government from Bonn in August 1999, the gutted dome has now been replaced by Sir Norman Foster's masterpiece.



By the side of a country lane in Normandy — the D176 just west of the village of Reviere — at a point where the road crosses the river Seulles, stands a squat, weather-worn memorial stone. Positioned a little below the road embankment and hidden from view by the tall grass, it stands unnoticed and forgotten. Not mentioned in any of the guidebooks to the D-Day battlefield, nobody stops to have a look at it, yet it is a unique relic of the 1944 Normandy campaign. Chiselled out in the hard rock, the inscription on the stone reads: 'Pont Isaac. Built by 183 Fd Coy, RE, June 1944'.

Reviere and the Seulles bridge lie some three miles inland from Juno Beach. On D-Day, the Canadian Regina Rifle Regiment — part of the 7th Brigade of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division — having landed at Courseulles, moved inland rapidly and by mid-morning had reached the village and seized the river crossing at the bottom of the hill, one kilometre west of the village, which was their specific objective. The bridge there, an old three-arch masonry affair, constituted a vital connecting point between the western and eastern half of the planned British bridgehead.

With the Allied armies streaming ashore and military vehicles making massive use of the two-way road, the narrow Seulles bridge, which was in bad repair due to enemy action, soon formed a serious bottleneck, resulting in long traffic jams. By D+8 the situation had become so bad that HQ 6th Army Troops, Royal Engineers, received orders to build a Class 40 one-way bridge adjacent to the existing bridge to eliminate the bottleneck and open the route completely to two-way traffic. The task was assigned to 183rd Field Company, RE.

Commanded by Major D. J. Isaac, 183rd Field Company had landed on Gold Beach and by D+8 was camped near Ver-sur-Mer. The company was still without its vehicles, both MT serials (which had been scheduled to join with the unit on D+5) having so far failed to show up.

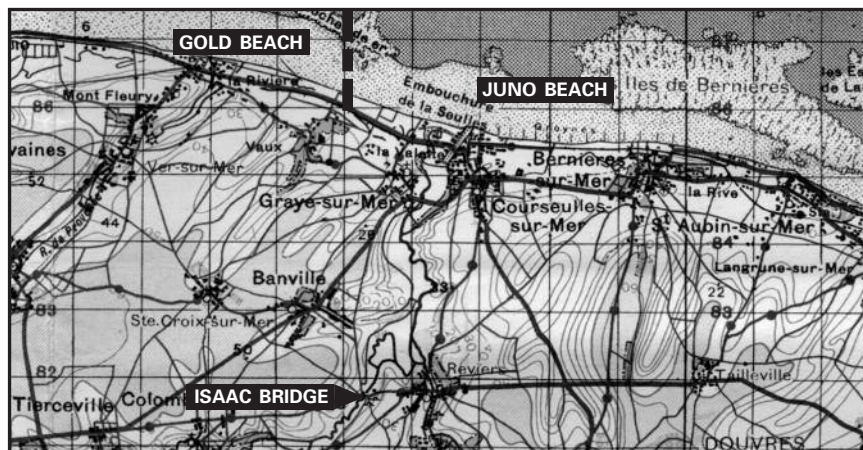
'Pont Isaac' — built across the Seulles river in June 1944 by 183rd Field Company, Royal Engineers, and named after the company commander, Major D. J. Isaac. Although the bridge has long since gone, the memorial stone placed on the river bank by the engineers in June 1944 remains until this day. Not mentioned in any of the guidebooks to the Normandy battlefield, *After the Battle* discovered it purely by accident during the preparation for *D-Day Then and Now* in June 1994.

ISAAC BRIDGE

By Karel Margry

Early on June 14, having been warned of the new job, the unit moved from Ver-sur-Mer to the Seulles site, a distance of five miles. No standard bridging material was available, so the bridge would have to be improvised from local resources. While the

company dug in, recon parties were sent out to scrounge the neighbourhood for stores and building materials. An assortment of



'Isaac Bridge' lay on the D176 between Reviere and Colombiers-sur-Seulles, some three miles south of Juno Beach — the Seulles river there forming the boundary between Mike and Nan sectors.

On June 15, 1944 — the day on which 183rd Field Company began work on the bridge — Army photographer Sergeant Jimmy Mapham happened to pass by the site and he stopped to take three pictures. *Right:* While the engineers, helped by a bulldozer, work on the approach roads to the new bridge, traffic rolls across the adjacent stone bridge, which is only one-lane. The view is west towards Colombiers-sur-Seulles. The Sherman tank on the far bank stands at the junction with the side road which leads north to Banville. (IWM)

reinforced steel joints (RSJs), reinforcement rods and quantities of washed aggregate were found at a German pillbox still under construction in Ver-sur-Mer, and approximately ten tons of Belgian cement in a building near Crépon (four miles to the west). A quarry found within 400 yards of the bridge site would yield stone pitching, filling and surfacing for the approach roads to be constructed. No timber was found with the exception of four 13-foot-long heavy balks, but it was arranged that felled trees, to be sawn into decking timber, would be supplied from Bayeux (12 miles away).

During the day, the MT serial commanded by Lance Sergeant Hayes — 18 men and eight badly-needed vehicles — arrived. The company now had an office truck, water truck, three 3-tonners — one per platoon — and three White scout cars, also one per platoon.

Next day, June 15, recces for stores continued. There was still no sign of the other D+5 serial, so Assembly Areas were notified of the company's new location.

By now, the unit engineers had the design for the new bridge ready. It would be constructed at right angles across a wet gap of 42 feet, north (downstream) of the existing bridge, using an existing stone plinth on the east bank for stabilising the bankseat (i.e. the bridge's bankside support) at a height of five feet from water level to finished decking. In order not to further obstruct the flow of the river — already constricted due to the existing bridge — the new bridge would have three arches supported by two piers.

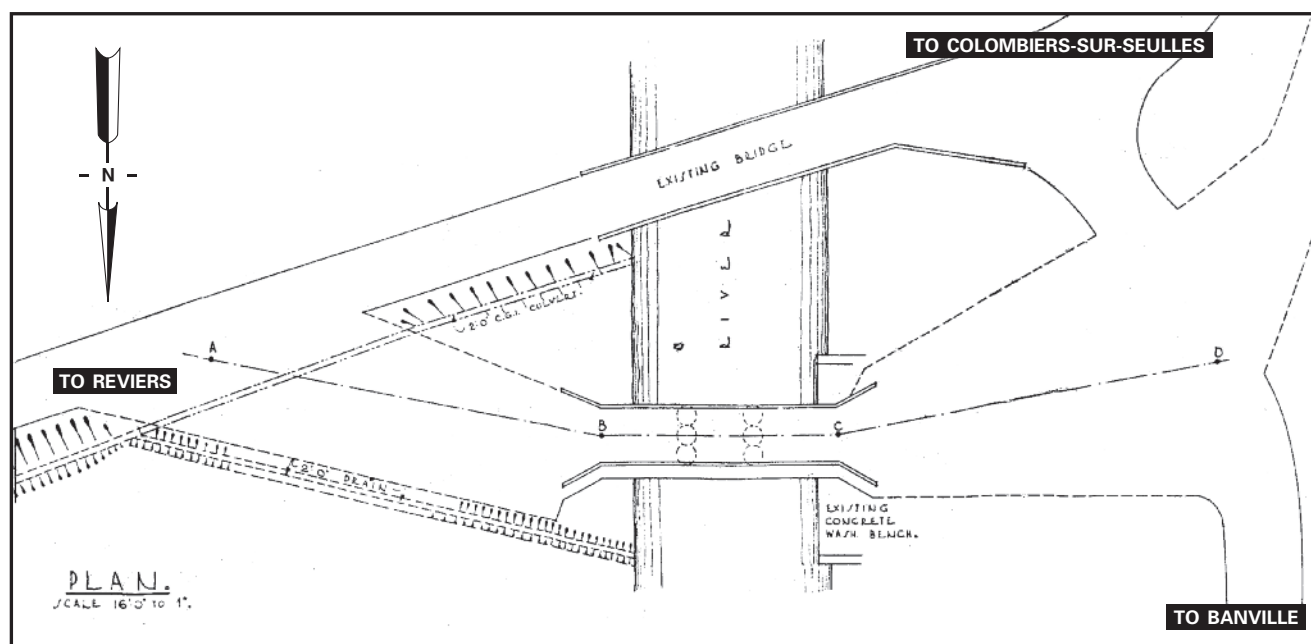
The engineers had come up with the idea



Today, a new bridge replaces the old stone one. Of 'Isaac Bridge' only the concrete bankseat on the right remains.

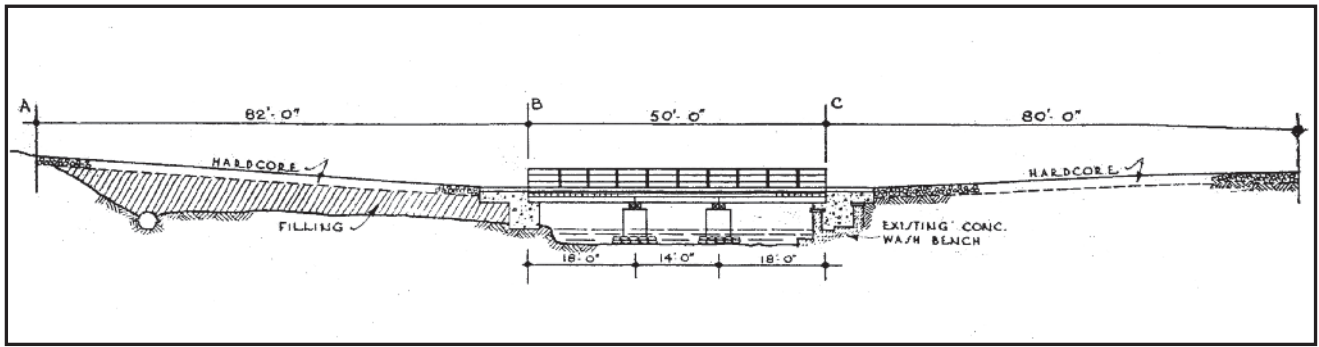
to construct the piers using discarded 'Roly-Poly' drums. Roly-Poly was one of those special 'carpet-laying' devices designed and operated by the assault engineers of the 79th

Armoured Division for the Normandy landings. It consisted of a length of steel roller shuttering wound onto a four-foot-diameter wooden drum which, mounted on AVRE



The special feature of the improvised bridge was the use of wooden 'Roly-Poly' drums — the hollow cores left over from the 'beach matting' laid by 'carpet-laying' AVRE tanks during the beach assault nine days before — as shuttering for the concrete piers. Three Roly-Poly drums were placed upright in

the river, side by side and parallel with the river flow, and filled with concrete to form a firm 12-foot-wide pier. Two such piers were considered sufficient to support the bridge. This plan also shows the two approach roads to be constructed, and the culvert to be laid under the eastern road. (PRO)



Longitudinal view of the bridge. Note how the existing wash bench has been incorporated into the western bankseat. (PRO)

tanks, could be unrolled over soft clay patches in the beaches. (The other type of carpet-laying tank, the Bobbin, laid out heavy lengths of reinforced matting.) Plenty of discarded Roly-Poly drums could be recovered from the assault beaches.

The basic idea was to place three such Roly-Poly drums side by side and upright on a firm base in the river, encase them in a sheet of corrugated iron, fasten the hollow pier thus formed to the river floor, and then fill up the drums by pouring wet concrete into them. This would result in a strong solid pier. On top of the two piers would then come balk supports on which would be built a roadway consisting of RSJs, cross-laid with decking timbers, and topped by a timber wearing surface.

Preliminary work commenced immediately, first task being to level off the site for the bridge and the new approach roads. Assignments were as follows: No. 1 Platoon was allotted the eastern approach road and bankseat, No. 2 Platoon the western approach and bankseat, and No. 3 Platoon was responsible for the quarrying and provision of filling, pitching and surfacing. Concretors and carpenters were withdrawn from the platoons to work on the bridge construction.

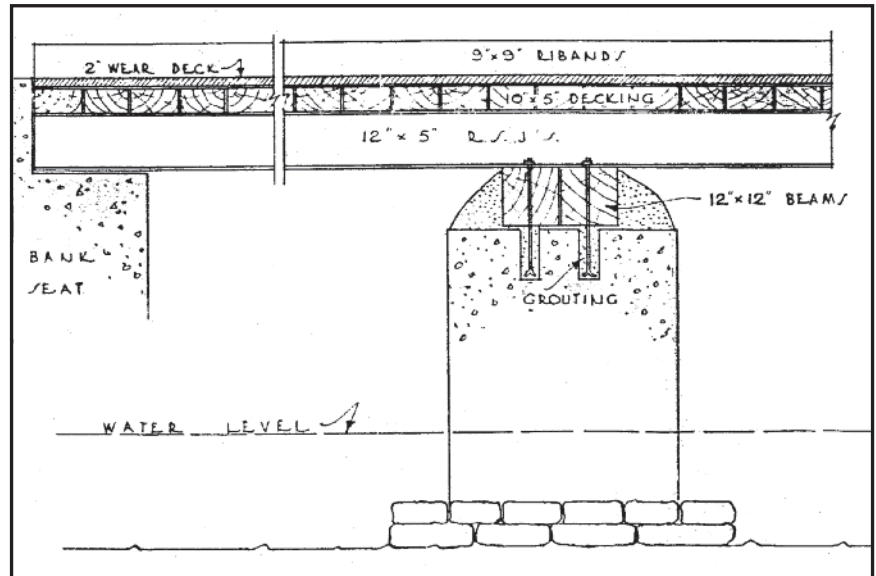
Work on the approaches occupied most of the first day. The roads were quarry filled up to a depth of 18 inches below finishing level. Over this was laid a three-inch sand cushion layer, nine inches of hardset limestone pitching, a further three inches of sand and small filling, and finally a three-inch finishing surface of clean gravel. Each layer was hosed, consolidated and rolled by a 6½-ton roller.

The eastern approach road consisted of 25 yards of new roadway rising at a gradient of 1 in 15 from a height of two feet above the adjacent field at the bank seat to seven feet above at the junction to the existing road. The finished road was 15 feet wide at the entrance, funnelling out to 25 feet at the road junction. An existing ditch was laid with three-foot drain culverting obtained from RE stores, and new ditches dug draining the approach roads.

The western approach road, 15 feet wide and 50 yards long, curved to form an easy bend and was well funnelled at the transverse road (the small road running north to Banville) to facilitate traffic to and from that direction.

No. 3 Platoon, working in the quarry, loaded 320 tons by hand on the first day. Later, a face shovel was obtained. All platoons worked till 8.30 p.m., undisturbed by enemy shelling or air activity. During the evening, there was a slight consternation when Sapper Ingram was shot at while attending a call to nature in a wood. A confused sniper hunt followed, but nothing was found. The night was quiet, with no incidents.

Work on the bridge itself started on the second day, June 16. Eight tippers and one mixer were attached from the RASC, also the workshops lorry of 227th Field Park Company which would saw the trees sup-

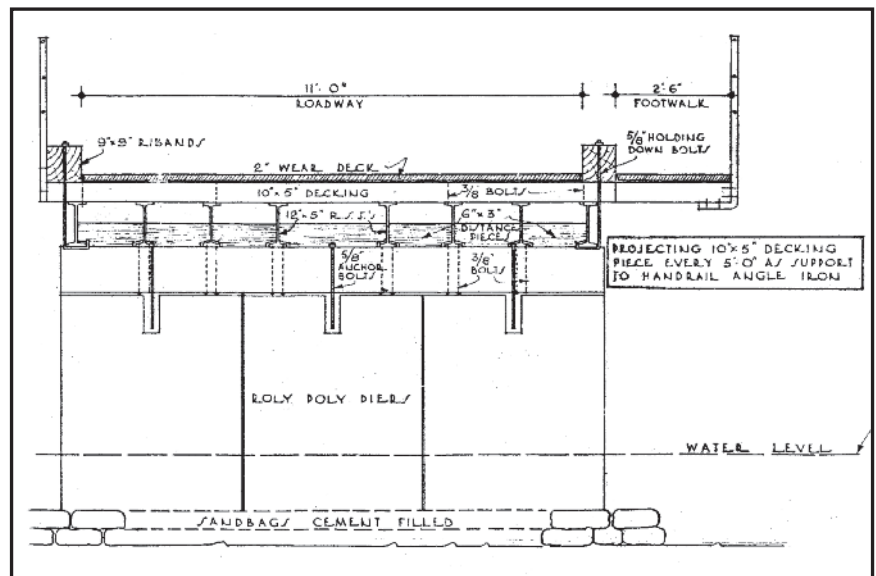


Longitudinal view showing how the roadway was fastened to the Roly-Poly piers. (PRO)

plied from Bayeux for decking timber. Work began at 8 a.m. and continued until 8.30 p.m. Most of the day was spent cutting the Roly-Poly frames, and preparing the bases for the two piers. These consisted of two layers of concrete-sandbags laid on a prepared site levelled out of the river bed to prevent any danger of securing beneath the piers. 'Work

going well. Company at good heart', noted the unit war diary.

The following day, June 17, work progressed well. Five more tippers were made available. 'Men putting their backs into it', noted the war diarist. The Roly-Polys, held together by the corrugated iron and put in position in the river, were well secured to the



Cross-section showing the four layers of the bridge's superstructure: on top of the piers came two heavy timber beams; these supported eight RSJs (spaced by wooden distance pieces) which formed the bridge arch; cross-laid on top of these came the timber decking; the whole being topped by a timber bearing surface. (PRO)



Left: Sergeant Mapham pictured the engineers working on the concrete wash bench which already existed on the west bank and will be incorporated into the bankseat on that side. Others are laying sandbags for the pier foundations on the river bed.



In the background is the stone arch bridge captured by the Regina Rifles on D-Day. Note the poles placed in the river upstream from the bridge to intercept floating debris. Right: The men building the pier foundations. (IWM)

river bed by means of six-foot angle iron pickets. Wet concrete was then poured into them. The timber cross structure of the Roly-Poly having been removed, the drums were reinforced by angle irons connecting each drum into the solid pier. By the end of the day, both piers were complete and filled, and final work on the approach to the transverse road under way.

By June 18, two face shovels, one bulldozer and 13 tippers were available for the men working on the approaches and the bankseats. The latter consisted of concrete reinforcement by steel mesh and were levelled off to seat the RSJs.

Meanwhile, other sappers worked on the roadway. Two of the 13-foot timber balks were laid side by side centrally over each of the piers and rag-bolted into them. These formed the bearing surface for the RSJs, the majority of which were 12 x 5 inch varying to 11 x 4½ inch and in lengths of up to 18 feet. The east and west spans were arranged to contain the heavier RSJs, each with a clear span of 15 feet, while the centre span of 12 feet contained the lighter joints. Steel packing, cut from ½-inch plating, was placed on the bearing surface in order to true up the level of the top flanges throughout the bridge. Each span used eight RSJs set at 1 foot, 5½ inches centres under the wheel bases, and all RSJs were bolted down to the timber balks.

By the end of the fourth day, the bridge was 65 per cent complete. The approaches were ready, all RSJs were in position, but work on the decking had been delayed because of a failure to get adequate supplies in Bayeux.

That evening, the missing D+5 serial was finally found at Buhot near Arromanches (11 miles away), and it arrived in the company harbour at 9.30 p.m. with 20 men, one Jeep, one lorry, three White scout cars, and four 3-tonners.

On June 19, all platoons were working on the bridge, completing the roadway. Decking timbers, 12 feet long, were laid transversely across the RSJs, while 15-foot-long timbers were used to carry the footwalk on the north side, the whole being bolted down to the top flange of the outside and two central RSJs. Timber ribands, nine by nine inches, were laid on the decking to give a clear 11-foot carriage way. These were bolted through to

the RSJs, and a 2-inch wearing surface was nailed to the decking. The footwalk consisted of 2½-inch timbers laid longitudinally with the bridge, and nailed to the decking below. Again there was a delay caused by not receiving enough timber, but by the end of the day, the bridge was 80 per cent complete.

On June 20, platoons worked in shifts — No. 1 Platoon from 5 to 11 a.m., No. 2 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., and No. 3 from 4 to 9 p.m. — putting the final touches to the bridge. Angle iron handrails were shaped, cut and drilled to receive three horizontal ½-inch reinforcing rods constituting the railings. All ribands and railings were painted white for the ease of drivers at night. A timber post and rail fence was erected along the steep bank formed by the road filling on the west approach. Both bankseats were filled with concrete and levelled off flush with the finished deck surface. Concrete upstands, nine by nine inches, were laid to conform with the decking ribands and funnelled out to guide traffic on to the bridge.

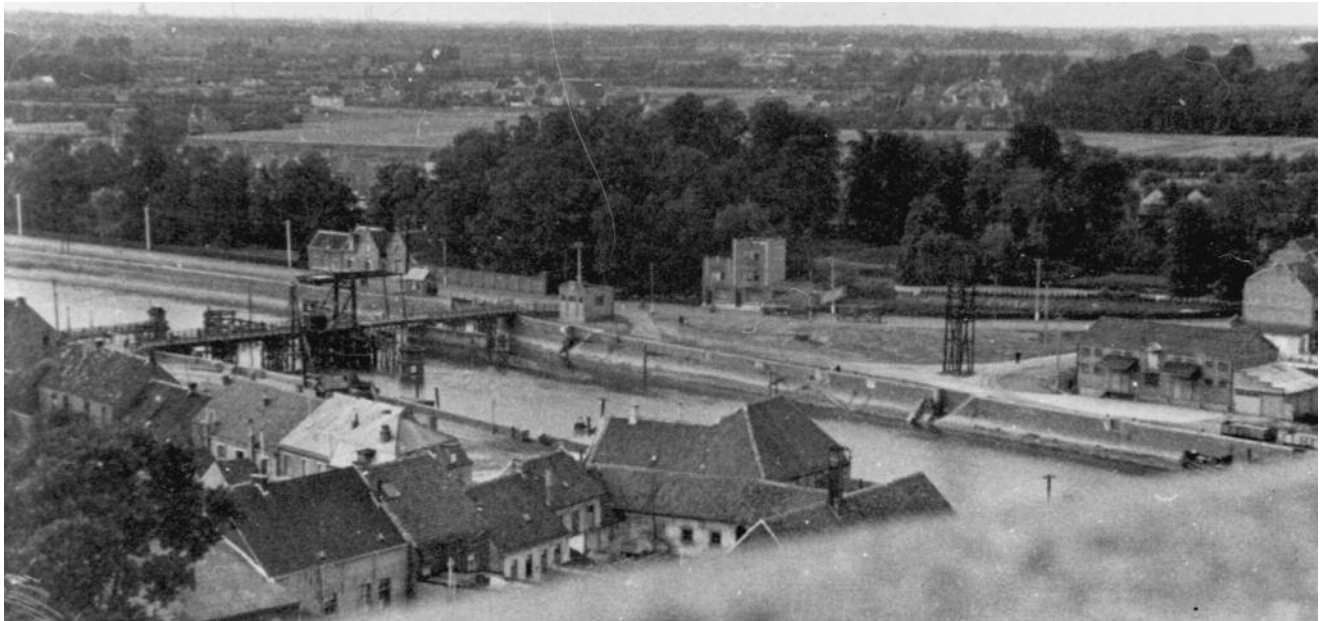
There was little rest for the men of 183rd Field Company. Late that day, the company received orders to move to a new location near St Gabriel-Brécy, five miles to the south-west, the order being to construct a new road over virgin ground. No. 1 Platoon was ordered to remain behind to complete the decking. The bridge was opened to traffic at midnight on June 20/21. It was christened 'Pont Isaac' in honour of Major Isaac, the company commander.

The new bridge adequately solved the traffic problem at the Seullès crossing and, for the rest of the Normandy campaign, there was no more congestion at the bridge.

Today, a new modern bridge, built on the site of the old masonry bridge, carries the D176 across the Seullès. Both the original arch bridge and 'Isaac Bridge' have disappeared. But on the river's east bank, tucked away beside the road verge, survives the memorial stone proudly naming the span built by 183rd Field Company over five decades ago.



Looking from the memorial stone on the east bank across to the bankseat/wash bench on the west bank.



Between September 4-6, 1944, a battle took place at the small town of Wetteren in Belgium for possession of a bridge across the Schelde (Scheldt) river. This little-known action is interesting for several reasons. Firstly because so many different formations were involved: within a span of 24 hours, advance units of three different British divisions entered Wetteren, each on its own mission and unaware of the others' presence, yet each contributed to the capture of the bridge. Secondly, once captured, the bridge constituted the only crossing point of the Schelde for the 7th Armoured Division, and thus was vital to its

continued advance northwards. And thirdly, the subsequent stand by a gallant band of Royal Engineers against repeated German counter-attacks provides a prime example of a small unit in defence. This picture — taken on the morning of September 4 from the tower of Wetteren's St Gertrudis church — gives a good panoramic view of the battlefield. In the left foreground lies the bridge, its middle section not yet in the lifted position found by the British a few hours later. Immediately beyond it is the bridgehead area defended by the Royal Engineers on September 6.

THE BATTLE FOR WETTEREN BRIDGE

On September 4, 1944, a strong armoured force of the British 7th Armoured Division, named 'Ghent Force', entered Belgium and after a dash of over 50 miles reached Kerckhoven, less than 15 miles from the objective after which the force was named (see *After the Battle* No. 94). That same day, a reconnaissance force of the neighbouring 11th Armoured Division reached the small town of Wetteren, eight miles east of Ghent. Wetteren, like Ghent, lies on the Schelde and has a bridge across the river. Seized intact the following day by 'Ghent Force', this bridge in the next 36 hours became the site of an intense, small-unit battle between the 4th

Field Squadron, Royal Engineers (part of the 7th Armoured Division), which had been ordered to defend the bridge, and part of a reinforced regiment of the German 70. Infanterie-Division, which had been ordered to retake it. Successfully won by the 7th Armoured troops, the Battle of Wetteren Bridge holds a distinguished place in the annals of the 'Desert Rats' division.

What makes this battle special in another way is that the defenders of the bridge were primarily Royal Engineer troops rather than infantry. The successful defence fought by a relatively small group of sappers against a considerably stronger enemy earned it a

By Jean-Paul Marchal

place in the *Normandy to the Rhine* volume of the famed *Royal Engineers Battlefield Tours* series published by the British Army after the war. In the words of Robert Warren, MC, one of the leading personalities of the battle: 'I suppose this was our first attempt to play the "infantry game". No doubt those who served in infantry units may regard this battle as just another everyday incident, but to us, whose prime job was, after all, engineering, the Battle of Wetteren was of some significance.'



A new pedestrian bridge now crosses the Schelde at this point, but otherwise the battlefield remains virtually unchanged.



Above left: Monday morning, September 4. Gleeful locals watch silently as the last German troops retreat through Wetteren. They are on the Markt, the central market square, and leaving the town along Wegvoeringstraat. Picture taken stealthily from the town hall steps. Above right: When we took our comparison in September 1998, the annual fun-fair was just being erected.



MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

The greater part of Wetteren lies on the south bank of the Schelde. On the morning of September 4, the cobble-stoned streets of the town were deserted, except for some inhabitants watching the retreat of the last Germans through the town centre. These troops were moving east, staying south of the Schelde. A few German troops were still in position on the northern bank guarding the road bridge — a wooden, three-span construction on timber piles with a centre section that could be raised from the southern bank. The bridge had been wired for demolition. However, when at about 1100 hours orders were given to detonate the charges, the blast only resulted in damaging the wooden decking. (A rumour later transpired that the ignition wires had been cut.) By mid-day, Wetteren south of the Schelde was empty of German troops.

In the early afternoon, a combined tank/infantry force of the 11th Armoured Division reached Wetteren from the south. About 1345 hours, No. 1 Troop (Lieutenant A. M. Bryce) and No. 2 Troop (Lieutenant P. Hodgson) of A Squadron (Major Mark Pearson) of the 15th/19th Hussars — altogether five Cromwells — with a complement of infantry of the 1st Herefords riding on the tanks, reached the outskirts of the town from the direction of Massemen. Rolling on along Massemensteeweg, Stationsstraat and Florimond Leirensstraat, the force reached the Markt, the town's main market square, by 1500 hours. Welcomed by an overjoyed population, in no time the tanks and the infantrymen were covered in flowers. However, the British force did not stay in Wetteren long, but soon left the town via Wegvoeringstraat to continue its probe eastward along the southern river bank. No attempt was made to capture the half-blown bridge, or cross the river.

About this time, at 1600 hours, a motor yacht was seen approaching the bridge from the west, followed a few minutes later by a motor barge. Its skipper, Constant Van den Poel, recalls: 'On September 1, I was ordered

A few hours later, a small force of the British 11th Armoured Division — five Cromwell tanks from A Squadron, 15/19th Hussars, with some infantry of the 1st Herefords riding the decks — enters Wetteren from the south-west, welcomed by an ecstatic population. This Cromwell was pictured in Stationsstraat.





A few minutes later, the Cromwells have reached the Markt.



Comparison from an upstairs window of one of the local pubs.



Above and below: Herefords infantrymen fraternise with the local girls in Florimond Leirensstraat, just short of the Markt.



The same Cromwell that we have just seen arriving, now pictured in front of the St Gertrudis church.

by the Germans to load up a Kriegsmarine depot at Oostende [Ostend]. There, a Kapitän and 13 soldiers boarded my barge, MS *Aligator*. When we started our journey to Hamburg, my boat was preceded by a yacht, also manned by a few Germans. We sailed along the Ostend-Bruges-Ghent canal, and reached Ghent on September 4. Here the convoy turned eastward onto the Schelde. At Wetteren bridge, some Germans left the yacht and raised the centre section to allow a free passage. Once beyond the bridge the *Aligator* was fired upon by men of the Resistance.'

In a bend of the river, a few hundred yards further downstream, the *Aligator* ran aground on the southern bank. The barge was immediately engaged from the same bank by members of the Resistance and also by at least one soldier of the Herefords. During the skirmish, one German was killed and several injured.

A little later, and shortly after the 11th Armoured recce party had left Wetteren, a Wehrmacht lorry was spotted on Kapellen-dries, the main road leading to the bridge from the north. German troops disembarked and began to position machine guns on the embankment. News of the return of Germans at the bridge was brought back to the town centre by some frightened civilians, and festivities there came to an abrupt end. People hurried inside and flags disappeared.

Fireman Willy Van Heden was dispatched to go after the British tank force and ask for assistance. Van Heden sped away on his motorbike along Wegvoeringstraat and managed to catch up with the 15th/19th Hussars group near Wichelen, six miles east of Wetteren. Major Pearson obliged and sent part of his force back to Wetteren. Some time later, one of the Cromwells, guided by another fireman, Emiel De Saedeleir, cautiously approached the bridge via Katte-straat, one of the narrow streets leading up to it from the town centre. From a vantage point, the tank opened fire and hit the German truck. A huge explosion followed, which demolished a small transformer station beside the northern bridge ramp and several nearby houses, and killed or fatally injured ten civilians as well as several Germans. It later transpired that the lorry had been loaded with explosives — obviously in a last attempt to destroy the bridge. With this explosion, about 1830 hours, the day's action at Wetteren ended.

Below left and right: After about an hour, the small British force departs again, leaving the Markt along Wegvoeringstraat, in pursuit of the Germans who took the same street that morning.





Above and right: The following day, Tuesday September 5, a troop of D Squadron, 11th Hussars — the reconnaissance regiment of the 7th Armoured Division — enters Wetteren. This Dingo scout car (left) and Daimler armoured car (right) were pictured in Moerstraat, about 100 yards short of the Wetteren bridge.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

When 'Ghent Force' of the 7th Armoured Division resumed its advance on the morning of the 5th, its right-flank column — comprising the tanks of 5th Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards (5th RIDG), and A Company of the 1st/6th Battalion, The Queen's Royal Regiment, preceded by scout cars of the 11th Hussars — crossed the Schelde at Oudenaarde and diverged eastward, their orders being to seize the Schelde bridges at Melle and Wetteren, re-cross the river there and cut the German escape routes from Ghent to Antwerp. Apparently, when Major-General Gerald Verney, the commander of the 7th Armoured Division, issued these orders, he was unaware that a reconnaissance force of the 11th Armoured Division had already 'liberated' Wetteren the day before.

That morning, civilians in Wetteren spotted a large group of Germans at Overbeke, a



suburb to the south-west. To avoid trouble, the mayor of Wetteren, Jozef Du Château, walked out to the enemy to negotiate. A very arrogant German officer told him they were retreating towards Antwerp and that they would, at all costs, traverse Wetteren. (They were obviously unaware that Antwerp had already fallen the day before.) In the end, it

was agreed that Du Château and alderman Gustaaf Van de Meerssche would 'shepherd' the Germans through the centre of Wetteren under a white flag. Moving via Gentsesteenweg, Hoenderstraat, Florimond Leirensstraat, Markt and Wegvoeringstraat the column reached the next village, Schellebelle, where the two 'guides' left the Germans.



Left: They are soon joined by B Squadron of the 5th Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, and a decision is taken to try to capture the bridge. Cautiously, the force advances down Moerstraat, this



Cromwell being pictured by a civilian from Van Cromphoutstraat. The bridge is just around the corner to the right. **Right:** The cobblestones have gone, but little else has changed.



Above: The armoured force has reached the open square facing the Schelde river. The bridge (behind the lantern post) is still in its raised position, and the Germans are entrenched on the far bank. Within a few minutes, a party of sappers and Belgian

civilians will rush up to the bridge and by their combined weight lower the span into place, catching the Germans off guard. Below: The square is today Jan Coopplaard. Picture taken from the northern end of Moerstraat.

Some time later, around noon, a troop of armoured scout cars of D Squadron of the 11th Hussars reached Wetteren and found the bridge intact, but slightly damaged. The bridge's centre span was still in the raised position (since the passage of the *Aligator* the day before) and covered by enemy fire from the opposite bank. As a result of the Hussars' report, B Squadron (Major Tony Leavey) of the 5th RIDG was hurried forward. With the leading Inniskilling tanks were 2nd Lieutenant Robin Lindsay and a party of sappers from No. 2 Troop of the 4th Field Squadron, RE (a unit of the 7th Armoured Divisional Engineers). They were shortly joined by the squadron commander, Major D. J. O. Fitzgerald, DSO.

From the upper window of a house overlooking the river, Fitzgerald surveyed the scene. He realised that the centre section of the bridge, which pivoted at the south bank end, had to be lowered to allow infantry to rush across and clear the enemy from the far bank, before repair work could be done.

While tanks, positioned near the bridge, put on a large volume of fire across the river, Fitzgerald consulted some civilians and was



told that the easiest way to lower the centre span was to put a counter-weight on it. A plan was quickly made and, led by Fitzgerald, a few civilians and members of the Resistance dashed across the open square in front of the bridge (today Jan Coopplaard) and

ran up the raised span. Their combined weight caused it to drop into place. This bold move was carried out under the very noses of the Germans who were taken completely by surprise — at any rate no one was hit by their fire.



The same Cromwell, but now looking back into Moerstraat.



Five decades later, people still watch from the pub door.



Left: At the other end of the square, just to the right of the bridge, another Cromwell and a light Honey tank (its rear end just visible) have taken up position, keeping the main road from the north and the roads along the river covered. Members of the Belgian resistance, recognisable by their armbands, have appeared on the scene. No doubt they belong to the group that helped Major Fitzgerald in lowering the bridge. The man on the right (with hat) is Jozef Du Château, the mayor of Wetteren, who earlier that day guided a large German force through Wetteren under a white flag, in order to avoid unwanted clashes with the resistance.



Lieutenant Lindsay and his sappers then went forward with some timber to put on the bridge's damaged decking in order to allow infantry to cross. The 'Ghent Force' group had brought no supporting infantry, but, as it happened, an infantry company of yet another division — B Company of the 6th Green Howards, part of the 69th Brigade of the 50th (Northumbrian) Division — had just rolled into Wetteren and these gave a hand. Crossing the bridge, they entered into a sharp fight with the Germans, weeding them out of the area beyond the bridge. Prisoners taken were locked up in the cellar of the town hall on the market square.

Alerted by all the activity on the southern bank, the Germans on the other side of the river have opened fire. Civilians and members of the Wetteren fire brigade take shelter behind the quay wall. The Ford truck is the fire brigade's ambulance.





Just about this time, a small infantry force from yet another division — the 50th Infantry Division — is entering Wetteren along the same route taken by the 15th/19th Hussars group the day before. The force, consisting of B Company of the 6th Green Howards, two Bren carriers, one machine gun platoon and one 25-pounder gun, has been sent out 'to collect a force



of 250 enemy reported near Wetteren'. Instead of finding these Germans, they will find the Desert Rats in possession of the town and the bridge, and subsequently will give a hand in expanding the bridgehead. *Left:* One of the Green Howards' two Bren carriers was pictured entering Wetteren on Massemenssesteenweg. *Right:* The house on the right remains.



Left: Taken on the same spot on Massemenssesteenweg but looking the other way, this picture shows the sole 25-pounder attached to the force. *Right:* In 1944, the road carried straight



on across the railway into Stationsstraat. Today, the level crossing has been closed and traffic has to detour to the right in order to get to the town centre.



Left: A captain of the Green Howards (centre) on the Market square. Note the 'TT' (Tyne and Tees) patch of the 50th Northumbrian Division on his sleeve. It is only by a close study of the divisional signs and regimental badges visible in the



pictures taken at Wetteren on September 4-6 that one can establish the unit shown in a particular photo and hence the time it was taken. *Right:* Looking into Van Cromphoutstraat today. The corner house is the same as that in the picture on page 36.



Asked to help out with expanding the bridgehead, the Green Howards move down to the bridge via Van Cromphoutstraat.



Above: With the bridge lowered back in position and repaired by Royal Engineers, and the far bank secured by the Green Howards' infantry, the Desert Rats' armour — here a Cromwell of the 5th Inniskillings — is able to cross.

Below: When after the war a new road bridge was opened a few hundred metres upstream, the old swing bridge was removed. Its place was taken by a pedestrian bridge, built high to allow boats to pass under it.



The No. 2 Troop sappers carried on and repaired the bridge sufficiently to allow scout cars and armour to cross. First to cross, D Squadron of the 11th Hussars resumed its reconnaissance to the north-east in the direction of Zele. A and B Squadrons, 5th RIDG, crossed also and (with the attached company of 1st/6th Queens) continued their advance to the north-east along the axis Kalken—Overmere—Lokeren in order to cut the German escape routes from Ghent to Antwerp. Major Fitzgerald instructed Lieutenant Lindsay and his sapper party to stay with B Squadron, to whom they were attached, and they moved off with the tanks.

As the bridge at Melle, halfway between Ghent and Wetteren, had been blown up the day before, the Wetteren bridge was now the only divisional crossing point east of Ghent. Brigadier Harvey R. Mackeson, the commander of the 7th Armoured's 22nd Armoured Brigade, ordered that 4th Field Squadron should assume defence of the bridge while it carried out further repairs for divisional traffic. The reason why sappers were given the role of defenders was the acute shortage of infantry at this stage, the 7th Armoured Division at that moment being spread over a distance of about 80 miles.

Given these orders, Major Fitzgerald called for the rest of 4th Field Squadron, which was some three miles back, to come forward to Wetteren. A standard motorised RE field squadron, the 4th consisted of a HQ troop and three sapper troops, each of the latter consisting of six sections led by an NCO. Normal unit strength was seven officers and some 250 other ranks. For transport, a field squadron had six Humber scout cars, six White half-tracks (some of them armed with .50 calibre machine guns), some 16 3-tonners and about 13 15cwt lorries.

On receiving Major Fitzgerald's orders, the squadron (less No. 6 Section of No. 1 Troop, which was still back at Lille in France) motored up, led by the second-in-command, Captain 'Sam' Townsend, and on reaching the town at about 1600 hours found a leaguer in the grounds of a convent (today the St Jozefinstituut) adjoining the civilian hospital in Wegvoeringstraat.



A column of the 5th Inniskillings rolling through Moerstraat on its way to the bridge. Both A and B Squadron crossed, going north-east from Wetteren in an attempt to cut the German escape routes from Ghent to Antwerp.



A Sherman Firefly about to cross the bridge. The armoured regiments of the 7th Armoured Division were equipped with the



standard 75mm Cromwell, but each tank troop had one Firefly, which had the more-powerful 17-pounder gun.



The crowd inspects the remains of the transformer station on the northern bank, which was blown up the day before when a British tank shell hit a German truck full of explosives (it can be

seen, still intact, on the panorama picture on page 34). On the left, a Sherman Firefly guards Kapellendries, the main road into town from the north. Note the blast damage to the houses.

Second Lieutenant Robert Warren was the second-in-command of No. 1 Troop. He recalls his long journey into Belgium: 'I had been travelling all day in my Humber light recce car in order to rejoin the squadron. I had left Corporal Henderson and his No. 6 Section behind with the 1st Royal Tanks in the rest area, and he did not rejoin us till September 11. As I set off from Béthune (in northern France), I felt distinctly "groggy", and it grew worse during the day. It proved to be an attack of dysentery, although I didn't realise this till later on. We reached Oudenaarde where our car was stopped by some rather excited Belgians who told me that thousands of Germans were approaching the town. I had heard stories like this before and had learnt to take them with a pinch of salt. I was unaware of the situation as I motored along, for all I knew our forward troops could have been in Berlin. We sped on and finally caught up the squadron, just as it was entering Wetteren to join the OC.'

At 1600 hours, Major Fitzgerald held an 'O' group and detailed one party to complete repairs to the bridge. As reports were continuously being brought in by civilians of supposed enemy movements, he ordered three other parties to reconnoitre Wetteren's various approach roads.

The first patrol was led by Troop Sergeant Eric Morrall of No. 1 Troop. With some sappers of his troop in a half-track, he drove down Wegvoeringstraat going south-east towards Schellebelle. After about two miles, they spotted a German patrol coming down the river bank. They opened fire, killing one of the enemy. The others withdrew.

The second recce party was led by Lieutenant Warren: 'I went in my Humber recce car on the far side towards the north-west, together with Corporal J. 'Wozzle' Stuckfield, Driver Norman Amos and Lance Corporal Stubbs. We were obviously the first British troops who had been along here, and the civilians gave us a great reception: more flowers, wine and women to be kissed. These

salutations delayed our progress somewhat. We liberated what we thought was a large country mansion but turned out to be a Belgian ordnance factory [this was the château of the Cooppl Powder Factory — destined to figure prominently in the coming battle], and further on still, liberated a village. The people here told us that the Germans were in strength about a couple of miles further on, but their information was all very vague and nobody seemed quite sure where "further on" actually was. After quenching our thirst with some of the local beer at a little pub we returned to Wetteren.'

The third recce party, sent out by No. 3 Troop eastward along the northern bank of the river (Tragelweg), saw no sign of the enemy.

Major Fitzgerald, by this time, had chosen defensive positions on the northern bank of the Schelde, and these were occupied by about 1900 hours. Each troop was assigned a small perimeter area which it was to defend and hold.



The transformer stood right next to the bridge. Comparison taken from the steps of the present-day pedestrian crossing.

No. 1 Troop manned the sector on the left, some 700 yards north-west of the bridge. This built-up area on the edge of Wetteren, had streets lined with a few houses interspersed with gardens and open plots. As this sector would see the heaviest fighting, the layout of the streets and No. 1 Troop's dispositions there need to be described in more detail. The main street to the west was Coopallaan; some 80 yards to the south of this road, between it and the river and running parallel to both, was Peperstraat; connecting Coopallaan and Peperstraat at the western end was Peperstraatje. At the eastern end of Coopallaan, a small road, Molenstraatje, ran back to the main road from the bridge. Within the rectangle formed by Coopallaan, Peperstraat and Peperstraatje, No. 1 Troop was positioned as follows:

— No. 1 Section, seven men strong, was in Coopallaan, near the intersection with Molenstraatje.

— No. 2 Section, numbering six men, was also in Coopallaan, left of No. 1 Section and in front of Oscar Lercangée's textile factory.

— No. 3 Section, with eight men, was also in Coopallaan, left of No. 2 Section and near the intersection with Peperstraatje. In front of Nos. 1, 2 and 3 Sections was a large open field, part of which was used as a soccer pitch, with a country road, Vennestraat, on the far side.

— No. 4 Section, only five men strong, was in Peperstraatje, on the edge of another open field (known locally as 'Ham') stretching out towards the Coopal powder factory.

— No. 5 Section, six men strong, was on the waste ground south of Peperstraatje, between No. 4 Section and the river.

To guard the road coming in from the west (Coopallaan), two men were put in a slit trench (Listening Post) in front of the main troop position, near the junction of Coopallaan and Vennestraat.

The troop commander, Lieutenant Jim 'Dick' Turpin, had his headquarters (with the HQ Troop's half-track and Jeep) in a builder's yard on the south side of Peperstraat. The troop's second-in-command, Lieutenant Warren, had parked his Humber recce car in the same street, near the inter-



For lack of other troops, defence of the Wetteren bridge was now entrusted to the 4th Field Squadron, RE. Destined to play a prominent part in the coming battle were 2nd Lieutenant Robert Warren, second-in-command of No. 1 Troop (left), and Corporal 'Wozzle' Stuckfield of Troop HQ (right).

section with Peperstraatje, just between Nos. 4 and 5 Sections and some 400 yards west of Troop HQ. With only two officers and 39 other ranks, the troop was considerably understrength. Their armament consisted of three .50-calibre Browning machine guns (mounted on the half-tracks), four .30-calibre Browning light machine guns, five Bren guns and two PIATs.

The rest of 4th Field Squadron was disposed as follows:

No. 2 Troop (minus Lieutenant Lindsay's party who had gone with the 5th RIDG tanks) occupied the park of the 'De Vijvers' château, just north-west of the bridge and adjoining the right flank of No. 1 Troop's perimeter.

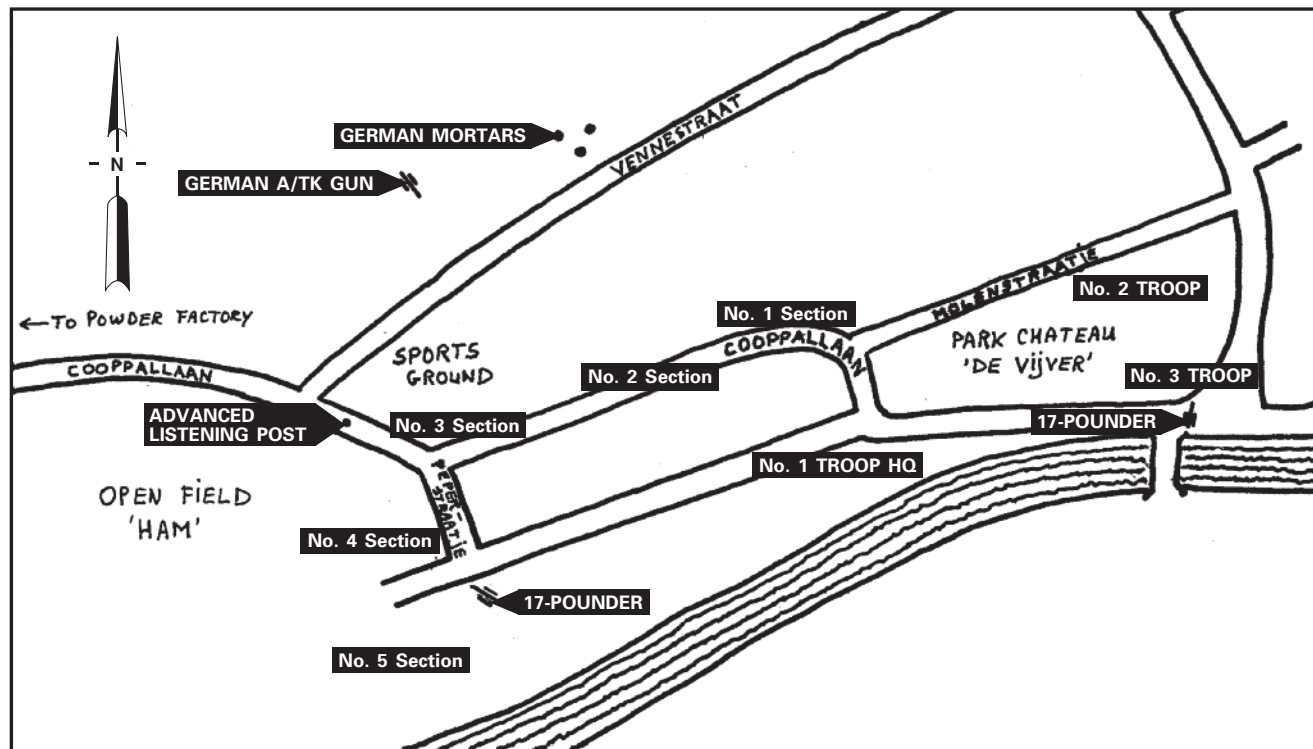
No. 3 Troop held the waste ground to the east of No. 2 Troop (on the northern bank), with a smaller detachment on the southern bank watching the approaches from the west.

The square facing the bridge on the southern bank, Moerstraat, the Markt, and Wegvoeringstraat as far as the convent, were guarded by a composite group made up of Squadron HQ and elements from each of the troops.

Two 17-pounder anti-tank guns of the divisional 65th Anti-Tank Regiment had been detached to 4th Field Squadron: one gun was placed just east of the northern bridge ramp (inside No. 3 Troop's perimeter), the other along Peperstraat with No. 5 Section of No. 1 Troop.

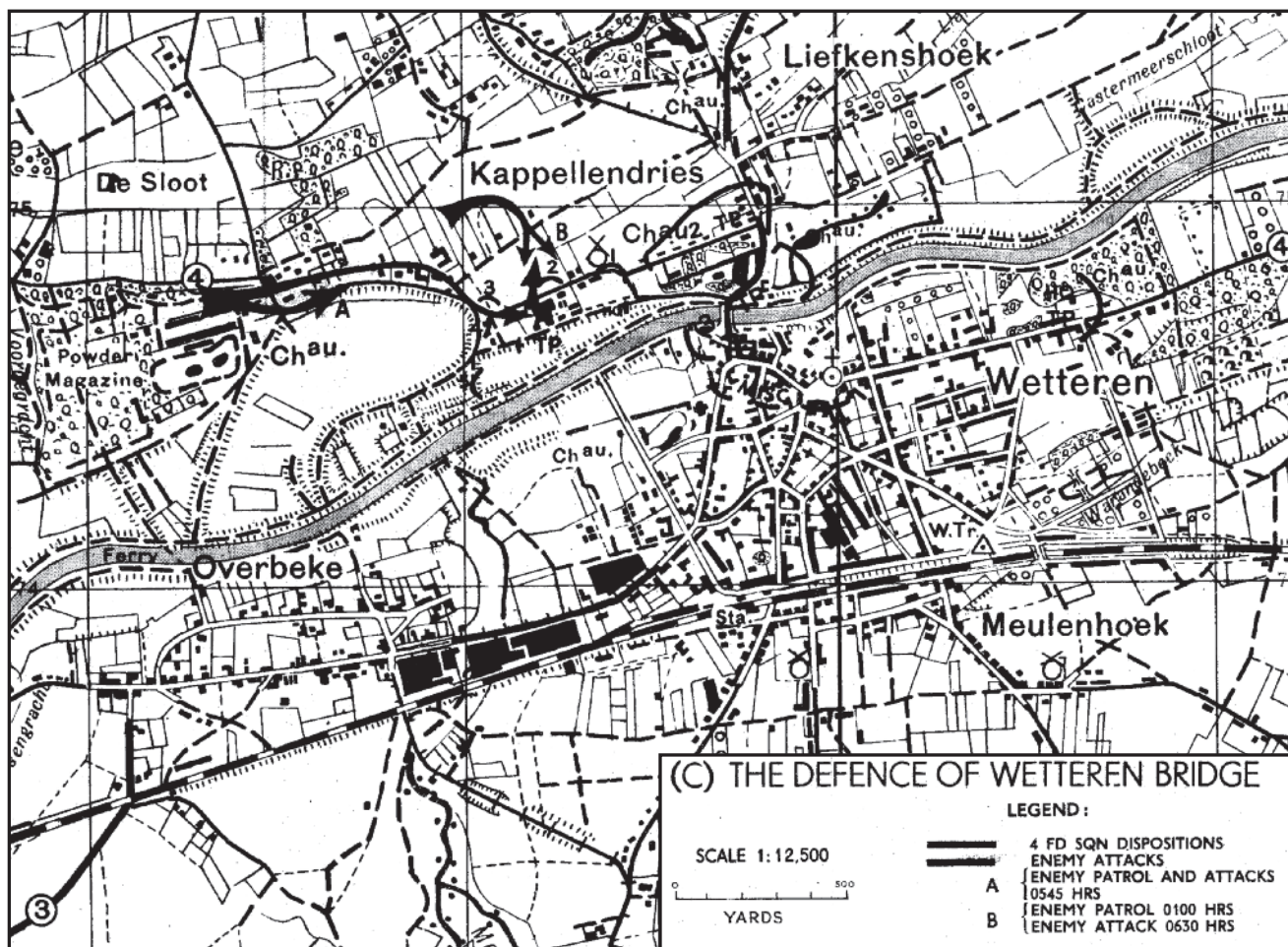
Wireless communications were opened up between troops and squadron HQ. Each troop posted guards. Those men not assigned to other duties were left free to sample the joys of the town. That evening, almost every café in town had its quota of 'Tommies' who were provided with free drinks. As darkness fell, Wetteren gradually assumed a more sober atmosphere and the men returned to their troop areas.

That evening, signs of German counter-moves became evident further away to the north. By 2100 hours, the 5th RIDG had achieved their objective of cutting the escape route from Ghent: A Squadron (Major John Ward-Harrison) had cut the Ghent—Lokeren road and B Squadron (Major Tony Leavey) the Ghent—Overmere road. During the night, Grenadier-Regiment 1020 of the German 70. Infanterie-Division (which was being hurried south from Walcheren with orders to man a new defensive line along the Schelde west and east of Ghent) put in an unsuccessful attack on B Squadron in an effort to reach its assigned sector (Heusden—Wetteren—Wichelen) along the river line. The Inniskillings, who had A Company of the 1st/6th Queens as supporting infantry, drove off the attack. The German regimental commander was so badly wounded that the Kampfkommandant of Ghent, Generalmajor Walter Bruns (see *After the Battle* No. 94, page 49), had to temporarily take over command of the regiment.



Sketch of the area just north-west of the bridge showing the defensive positions taken up by the troops of 4th Squadron,

and specifying those taken up by the sections of No. 1 Troop. The positions of the two 17-pounders are also indicated.



The map (taken from the *Royal Engineers Battlefield Tour*) shows the direction of the German night and morning attacks.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

The first German feelers towards the Wetteren bridge came after midnight. At 0100 hours, a German patrol came in under cover of the extreme darkness from behind the few houses in Vennestraat and crossed the open field between it and Coopallaan towards the No. 1 Troop positions. The Germans got almost on top of No. 2 Section before they were detected. Sappers Schofield and Haywood, manning a forward post, gave the alarm by firing a burst from their machine gun, but during the brisk exchange of fire which followed both were wounded. The situation was saved by the prompt action of Corporal Johnson, who fired the .50 Browning on the section's half-track, breaking up the attack. The Germans quickly retreated after casualties had been inflicted.

The two wounded sappers were brought in, but one of them, Sapper Antony Schofield, was in a very bad shape. Eric Morrall, the No. 1 Troop Sergeant, relates: 'I placed the poor lad in my Jeep, telling the driver, 'Tich' Bader, to cross the bridge and take the casualty as quickly as possible to a Mobile Dressing Station (MDS) several miles out of Wetteren. A little later, still in the dark, 'Tich' returned with the wounded lad, saying he couldn't find a way out of the town. With the aid of a local civilian, we managed to find our way out of the town by travelling back the route we had come in the afternoon before. After a while, we found what we were looking for in the darkness, on the side of the road, the MDS sign lit up in an upturned petrol can. I drove up the drive to a large building with this young lad sprawled across my lap and still losing blood. We got him into the building and to the on-duty Medical Officer only to find that he had just died.'

As soon as the firing started, Lieutenant Warren had radioed an alert message to Troop HQ back at the builder's yard. Lieutenant Turpin came up, doubled the guards, and later took Corporal Stuckfield out on a patrol to find out where the enemy was, but found nothing.

At 0545 hours, as daylight broke through a bleary sky, the two men in the forward listening post saw a strong German patrol coming down Coopallaan from the direction of the powder factory, and sounded the alarm. The

Germans were also moving around the back of the houses, and were now almost on top of No. 4 Section. Undaunted, Lance Corporal Douglas Crutchley of No. 5 Section dashed forward firing a Bren gun from the hip, wounding at least three Germans. His bold action took the enemy by surprise, and gave time for No. 3 Section to bring accurate fire down on the attacker. Unfortunately, Crutchley was hit by a bullet in the head and fell out in the open in front of the British positions.



Coopallaan, at the western tip of the engineers' perimeter, where No. 1 Troop had its two-man 'listening post', and where the dawn attack came in. Visible on the right is the junction with Vennestraat and, beyond it, the St Barbara school and chapel, where the German snipers had positioned themselves. On the left is the open ground known as 'Ham' stretching out towards the Coopall powder factory in the far distance (the factory is masked by the trees in the foreground). The Germans advanced down the road towards the camera.



The open fields (the 'sports ground'), across which the other German attacks came in, as seen from Vennestraat. The British were entrenched in the houses off to the left side of the field (outside the picture), and the Germans advanced from the right. The sports field which was at the far end has now gone.

All sections who could see a target were now putting down as much machine-gun fire as possible. The Germans retreated in confusion to covered positions beyond the junction of Coopallaan and Vennestraat, from where they replied with their own machine guns.

When he got word of Lance Corporal Crutchley lying hit in the open, Lieutenant Warren told his driver, Norman Amos, to get the Humber recce car (still in Peperstraat) forward and to pull it round in front of where Crutchley was lying. While Warren gave covering fire with the vehicle's .30 Browning, Lieutenant Turpin and Corporal Stuckfield dashed forward and dragged the wounded man to safety. Warren gave Crutchley some morphia and dressed his wound, but the corporal was unconscious and obviously in a bad state. Like he had done with sapper Schofield earlier, Sergeant Morrall took the wounded man aboard the Jeep and drove him to the MDS outside town. It was to no avail, for Crutchley died later that day.

By now, the battle had quietened down somewhat, though sniping continued on both sides — with little effect as it was still too dark to aim properly. Having reported the situation to the divisional CRE (Commander Royal Engineers), Lieutenant-Colonel A. D. Hunter, over the wireless, Major Fitzgerald came forward to inspect No. 1 Troop's positions with Lieutenant Turpin and to make arrangements for further supplies of ammunition. Although neither of the other troops had been in action, Fitzgerald did not dare send any reinforcement to No. 1 Troop, in case the direction of the enemy attack should suddenly switch. In view of the distance the wounded had to be moved, he ordered that all further casualties be brought to the civilian hospital (known locally as 'De Kliniek') adjoining the convent in Wegvoeringstraat, which was much nearer to the front line. He also instructed the squadron's Medical Officer, Lieutenant Hope (who was away with another RE squadron), to join the hospital, which he did two hours later.

Around 0630 hours, the Germans started shelling Wetteren's St Gertrudis church, on the market square across the river, with an anti-tank gun from behind Vennestraat. Lance Sergeant Brown of No. 1 Section spotted the gun and managed to silence it with his .50 Browning. Another anti-tank gun was sighted near the entrance to the Coopall powder factory, but it did not open fire. The 17-pounder on the waste ground south of Peperstraatje fired several shots at it, but the light was still not good enough to allow accurate aim. However, before it could be engaged properly, the German gun was moved away.

The next German move was to start mortaring No. 1 Troop's position from a nearby position somewhere beyond Vennestraat. After about 15 minutes of heavy shelling, German troops were spotted preparing for another attack. Nos. 2 and 3 Sections opened fire on these troops, inflicting several casualties. Lieutenant Turpin had gone round to No. 3 Section, who were in a state of some confusion, to take charge of the situation and organise the defence. Unfortunately, just then a heavy mortar bomb landed amidst the section, wounding Turpin, Corporal William Howkins, Sapper Hedley Alway and Sapper Ott. Seeing that Turpin had a bad leg wound, Corporal Stuckfield dashed forward, picked up the lieutenant and carried him on his back to safety. With Turpin out of action, Lieutenant Warren had to take over the troop. He remembers that Turpin gave him a smile and said: 'It's all yours, old boy, get the blokes organised'. The four casualties were brought into a nearby house and, again, Sergeant Morrall evacuated them to the 'Kliniek' hospital in the Jeep while under fire. Sapper Alway died of his wounds the same day, and Corporal Howkins the following day. (Howkins had previously won an MM and bar. Robert Warren said of him: 'He was one of the oldest squadron members and certainly one of the most fearless men I was ever privileged to meet'.) Lieutenant Turpin had his leg amputated a few days later.

Warren, now in charge of No. 1 Troop, went up to No. 3 Section and realised it had virtually been wiped out. From the upper window of a nearby house he saw about 25 to 30 Germans advancing across the sports ground, not towards the No. 1 Troop line but almost parallel with it. They were obviously unaware of the exact British positions. He engaged them with his Bren gun, causing a few casualties. A second group of Germans, about 20 strong, coming up from the back of the houses in Peperstraatje, caught his attention, and he realised that in a few minutes they would be on top of his No. 4 Section. Warren recalls: 'My first reaction was to "flap" as I could see myself being trapped. I left the house through the back door and over a garden wall, and joined some men of No. 4 Section who were somewhat bewildered and leaderless.'

The Germans were now penetrating the British positions and it really looked as if the sappers were going to be overrun. The attacking Germans were supported by snipers who had ensconced themselves in the building of the St Barbara school on the north side of Coopallaan, in the steeple of the adjoining school chapel, and in some nearby houses. These snipers were engaged by No. 4 and 5 Sections, with support from the 17-pounder gun crew.

By now, Lieutenant Warren and some men of No. 4 Section found themselves pinned down at the house on the corner of Peperstraatje and Coopallaan. They had to clamber over garden walls and break down a wooden gate into an alleyway, and make a series of dashes across the open streets, before they finally reached safety.

It was clear to Warren that his troop's perimeter was now much too large for its diminished strength. He passed word to No. 5 Section to hold on until the tow vehicle of the 17-pounder was brought up. Under covering fire from Nos. 4 and 5 Sections the anti-tank gun was pulled back along Peperstraat as far as Troop HQ in the builder's yard. Thereupon, these sections abandoned Peperstraatje, withdrawing to new positions closer in.

Meanwhile, another mortar bomb had landed amidst No. 3 Section, badly injuring Driver William Allen and slightly wounding another sapper. Allen had been brought into a house in Peperstraatje but, owing to the close-quarter fighting, could not be evacuated, and had to be left behind with the two women and one boy child sheltering in the cellar of the house when the others withdrew.



The 'hospital' in Wegvoeringstraat, used as medical aid post by 4th Field Squadron during the battle. The building was demolished a few years ago, and a residential home now occupies the site.

Right: Peperstraatje, held by No. 4 Section, as seen from Peperstraat. No. 8, where badly-wounded Driver William Allen had to be left behind owing to the close-quarter fighting, is the white house on the far left-hand side.

The German group that Warren had seen first, advancing across the sports ground fields, was by now nearing Molenstraatje, at the eastern end of No. 1 Troop's perimeter, where they were engaged at close quarters by Nos. 1 and 2 Sections. For the first time in the battle, No. 2 Troop, in the adjacent château park, could now also see the enemy, and gave assisting fire. Meanwhile, Corporal Stuckfield rallied the defenders in Cooppallaan. Heedless of personal danger, he moved from house to house, firing his Bren gun at the enemy from the hip. It was chiefly his courage and determination that broke up the attack.

Once again, Major Fitzgerald came down to see the situation at first hand. He officially put Lieutenant Warren in command of No. 1 Troop. Since No. 3 Troop was not in contact with the enemy, he ordered one of its sections to reinforce No. 1 Troop.

Having sent back a runner for ammunition and a new first-aid kit, Warren boarded his recce car and drove round the block of houses up to No. 2 Section, which was now in the most-forward position. Here, he was joined by Stuckfield, and together they tried to reach the house in Peperstraatje where the



wounded Allen had been left. However, their attempt failed owing to the intense sniper and machine-gun fire.

A large group of Germans was now pinned down in an area near two houses in Vennestraat, from the back of which their mortars were still firing.

The section from No. 3 Troop, sent up as reinforcement by the OC, now arrived and was placed with No. 1 Section. At this juncture, Colonel Hunter, the CRE, came driving up in his recce car, evidently to see what all the fuss was about. 'I think that he imagined

we had exaggerated the whole affair', recalls Robert Warren. 'But a couple of mortar bombs fell about 30 yards away, and this evidently changed his opinion somewhat, for after a quick survey he went back to order up some assistance in the shape of tanks and infantry.'

In order to get a better view of the enemy position, Warren and Stuckfield sneaked into a wooden shed in the back garden of a house on Cooppallaan, facing Vennestraat. Suddenly, a mortar bomb fell out of the sky, landing just outside. They dived to the floor but, fortunately for them, it was only a smoke bomb. This could only mean the start of a new attack and indeed, although their vision was somewhat limited by the smoke, they could see German troops forming up. Stuckfield poked his Bren through the shed window and fired a burst into the middle of the enemy group — the Germans dispersed and took shelter.

Fifteen minutes later, the CRE returned with some tanks of C Squadron (Major Creagh Gibson) of the 5th RIDG. A plan was quickly drawn up. One Cromwell, followed by Nos. 4 and 5 Sections on foot, went up along Peperstraat to the waste ground where No. 5 Section had originally been. A second tank followed this group but turned right into Peperstraatje to face the sports ground. (Sergeant Morrall and Sapper Meluish, riding on the deck of this Cromwell, dropped off at the house where Driver Allen had been left. He was brought back, taken to the hospital, but died of his wounds four days later, September 10.) A third Cromwell tried to come in between the RE positions in Cooppallaan and the enemy in Vennestraat, but was engaged by the German anti-tank gun from beyond Vennestraat. As the tank tried to move into a covered position, it got bogged down in a slit trench. A fourth tank, actually the OP Cromwell of the commander of B Troop of the 5th Royal Horse Artillery (part of 7th Armoured Divisional Artillery), positioned itself near No. 2 Section from where it could fire across the open ground.

The British counter-attack developed successfully. The houses occupied by the Germans in Vennestraat were shelled with high-explosive from the tanks and machine-gunned by the Brownings on the half-tracks. In the middle of this inferno, a white flag suddenly appeared at one of the houses. It was not from the Germans, but from an elderly couple who lived there. Both sides immediately stopped firing. Corporal Stuckfield and another sapper ran across the open space and brought the old couple back to safety. After this, the firing was resumed.

For the first time, the British defenders now felt they had the upper hand. A lot of sniping was still going on, mainly from the steeple of St Barbara's chapel in Cooppallaan, but Lance Corporal Stubbs of No. 4 Section silenced two of the snipers. Corporal Stuckfield with No. 1 Section, some men of



Above: In the afternoon, a company of the 1st/6th Queens joined the engineers, and with armour support from Inniskilling tanks, they together attacked and cleared the powder factory. Here, some of the 28 Germans taken prisoner in this attack are being led back from the factory. Below: The white house in the bend of Cooppallaan has gone and so have the trees, giving a clear view of the main gate of the powder factory (today the S.A. Omnicem).





Almost on the same spot, tankers and infantrymen pose with civilians and members of the fire brigade after the fighting died



down. Behind stands one of the two Cromwells of C Squadron, 5th Inniskillings, which supported the attack.



The firemen, under command of Lieutenant Hubert Joos, had driven out to the factory to put out fires that had erupted in some offices and three of the powder mills.



Few of the original factory buildings remain today.

Troop HQ, and the sergeant from the 17-pounder crew, now worked their way in a right flanking movement, supported by one of the Cromwells and Warren's recce car. They crossed the open field right up to the houses on Vennestraat in which most of the Germans were sheltering and launched an assault, wounding two of the enemy in the front garden. The majority of the Germans were in the cellars and now asked to surrender. The first man to come out had his hands up, but the second threw a stick grenade, which hit the ceiling doing no harm. Upon that, Stuckfield and the gunner sergeant dashed forward and sprayed the enemy in the cellar with their Bren guns.

No. 2 Section and the section from No. 3

Troop joined Stuckfield's party, and together they cleared out the whole area. Twenty-two Germans were taken prisoner at the rear of the houses and nine more were brought up from the cellars. Three heavy mortars were captured in the back gardens. All the POWs were sent back to Squadron HQ under escort.

At about this time, infantry of A Company of the 1st/6th Queens joined the engineers. With combined forces, and supported by two Cromwells, an attack was launched against the powder factory. During this, the 95mm Cromwell of Squadron Sergeant Major Jack Clayton of HQ Troop, C Squadron, was hit and 'brewed up'. The crew continued the fight on foot with Tommy guns, Clayton and

Trooper S. Addyman getting wounded in the fight.

In about an hour, the whole area was cleared and a further 28 POWs taken, including a German company commander and his pay clerk. When questioned, he stated that he had been given the task of recapturing the Wetteren bridge but had been unaware that it would be held in strength. The second German anti-tank gun was also captured.

With mopping-up completed, Major Fitzgerald recalled No. 1 Troop, and the original positions were consolidated, the defences being thickened up by men of A Company, 1st/6th Queens. It was now about 1500 hours. The battle for Wetteren bridge was over.



During the attack on the factory, the Germans knocked out the 95mm Cromwell of SSM Jack Clayton of the HQ Troop of



C Squadron. Later, the tank was towed back to the southern bank and parked in Brugstraat near the bridge.



Left: The fight over, German prisoners await their fate on the northern bank next to the bridge. In the foreground rests the debris of the demolished transformer station. Sunk against the southern bank lies the *Aligator*, the Belgian barge which had been requisitioned by the Kriegsmarine and had been involved in the short shooting skirmish with Belgian resistants on the Monday. Since then, the boat had lain moored along a jetty near the bridge, but at 1330 hours on Wednesday (a few hours before this picture was taken) it had been hit by a Panzerfaust projectile which caused it to capsize. After firemen had pumped the water out of her hold, the local population proceeded to loot the barge of all its contents.



This looting incident is today still very much a taboo at Wetteren. One of the very few willing to speak about it, fireman Jozef Dierens, recalls: 'In the evening, one could see banknotes drying on clothes lines!' Dierens himself took two items: a waterproof bag and a mysterious wooden box. 'A few days later', he remembers, 'two intelligence officers came to my place to collect the box: they told me it contained the secret codes of the Kriegsmarine!'

Although some of the British war diaries and published accounts of the battle identify the attacking Germans as SS troops, in actual fact they were men of Grenadier-Regiment 1020, possibly reinforced by stragglers from other units and (perhaps) some SS. Of the company-size force of well over 100, about 25 had been killed and 59 taken prisoner, including the wounded.

The 4th Field Squadron had suffered ten casualties, five of them fatal. Most of the squadron's fighting had been done by just one troop, No. 1, and all men lost were from this troop. Numbering only 41 at the start of the battle, they had lost nearly a quarter of their strength.

Later that day, the very weary and battered No. 1 Troop was withdrawn to the south side of the bridge for rest and recuperation. A last incident however occurred during the night, as Robert Warren recalls: 'I set up defensive positions in the sector we had been allocated to, but kept the guard down to a prudent minimum. I warned everybody to sleep fully clothed and with their arms at hand. I used the recce car as a look-out covering the road by the river [Kapellendries] and posted a couple of men with a Bren gun nearby.

'After a meal we all turned in for some sleep, except the two guards. Once again Norman, "Wozzle" and I slept in the recce car — we were getting used to it now! I was awakened at midnight by a discreet tapping on the side of the car. I looked out and there were the two sappers with the Bren gun, and all around them Germans!

'I hastily reached for my Sten, woke "Wozzle", and we cautiously poked our heads out. Fortunately, everything was all right for it was a group of Germans who wanted to surrender — they had lost their unit and were rather "browned" off. I suppose there were about a dozen of them, so I told "Wozzle" to take them to HQ.'



Left: The same German prisoners, now with the bridge in the background. Beyond it are the houses where 4th Field



Squadron HQ was located during the battle. Right: Today only one of the houses remains.



Later that afternoon, the prisoners were escorted to the municipal school for boys in Schoolstraat. Here they are in Kerkstraat.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

Next day, the men of 4th Squadron moved indoors and made themselves more comfortable. The local population was extremely generous and most of the men got their feet under somebody's table. 'We began to look upon Wetteren as our second home', recalls Robert Warren, 'and later when short leaves were allowed, many of us came here instead of going to Brussels.'

That evening, as retaliation for the loss of the bridge, German artillery shelled Wetteren between 1800 and 2130 hours, killing three civilians and wounding another three.

The squadron was congratulated by the Divisional Commander, General Verney, and the people of Wetteren also expressed their thanks through their mayor, Jozef Du Château. For his part in the action, Lieutenant Turpin was awarded the Military Cross. Corporal Stuckfield, the gunner sergeant from the 65th Anti-Tank Regiment, and SSM Clayton of the 5th RIDG received the Military Medal.

The three men of 4th Field Squadron who had died at the 'Kliniek' hospital in Wegvoeringstraat were initially interred in the local cemetery. Later, they were transferred to the British War Cemetery at Heverlee. The two men who had succumbed in the mobile dressing station are interred in the Leopoldsburg War Cemetery.

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The three sappers who died at the hospital were buried in the local cemetery, with civilian dignitaries and members of the squadron present to give honour. The second soldier on the right (with one 'pip' on his shoulders and wearing glasses) could be 2nd Lieutenant Warren, and the man to his left Corporal Stuckfield.

MEMBERS OF 4TH FIELD SQUADRON, RE, KILLED AT WETTEREN BRIDGE

Sapper Anthony Francis Schofield
Lance Corporal Douglas Edmund Crutchley
Sapper Hedley Richard Alway
Corporal William James Howkins
Driver William Allen

Died of wounds September 6, aged 19
Died of wounds September 6, aged 25
Died of wounds September 6, aged 24
Died of wounds September 7, aged 30
Died of wounds September 10, aged 27

Below: The grave markers contained two errors of date: Howkins did not die of wounds on the 9th but on the 7th; and Alway was not killed in action on the 8th, but he died of wounds on the 6th. The cemetery no longer exists, having been cleared in the 1950s. Howkins, Alway and Allen are today buried at Heverlee War Cemetery. Schofield and Crutchley, the two men who died in the Mobile Dressing Station outside the town, now lie in Leopoldsburg War Cemetery.



Memorial plaque to 4th Squadron, RE, unveiled in 1989 against the southern ramp of the pedestrian bridge.



FREDERICK AND
DOROTHY GILL
30TH APRIL 1940



THE FIRST COY. BANGS
KILLED BY ENEMY ACTION
IN ENGLAND DURING
THE SECOND WORLD WAR

